

# **Croft 4, Upper Halistra**

Watnish, Isle of Skye

NG 2447 5969

An  
Archaeological Watching Brief

February/March 1998

**Martin Wildgoose**

on behalf of

**Mr. & Mrs M. Wotton**

for

**The Highland Council Archaeological Service.**

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### **WATCHING BRIEF**

Summary

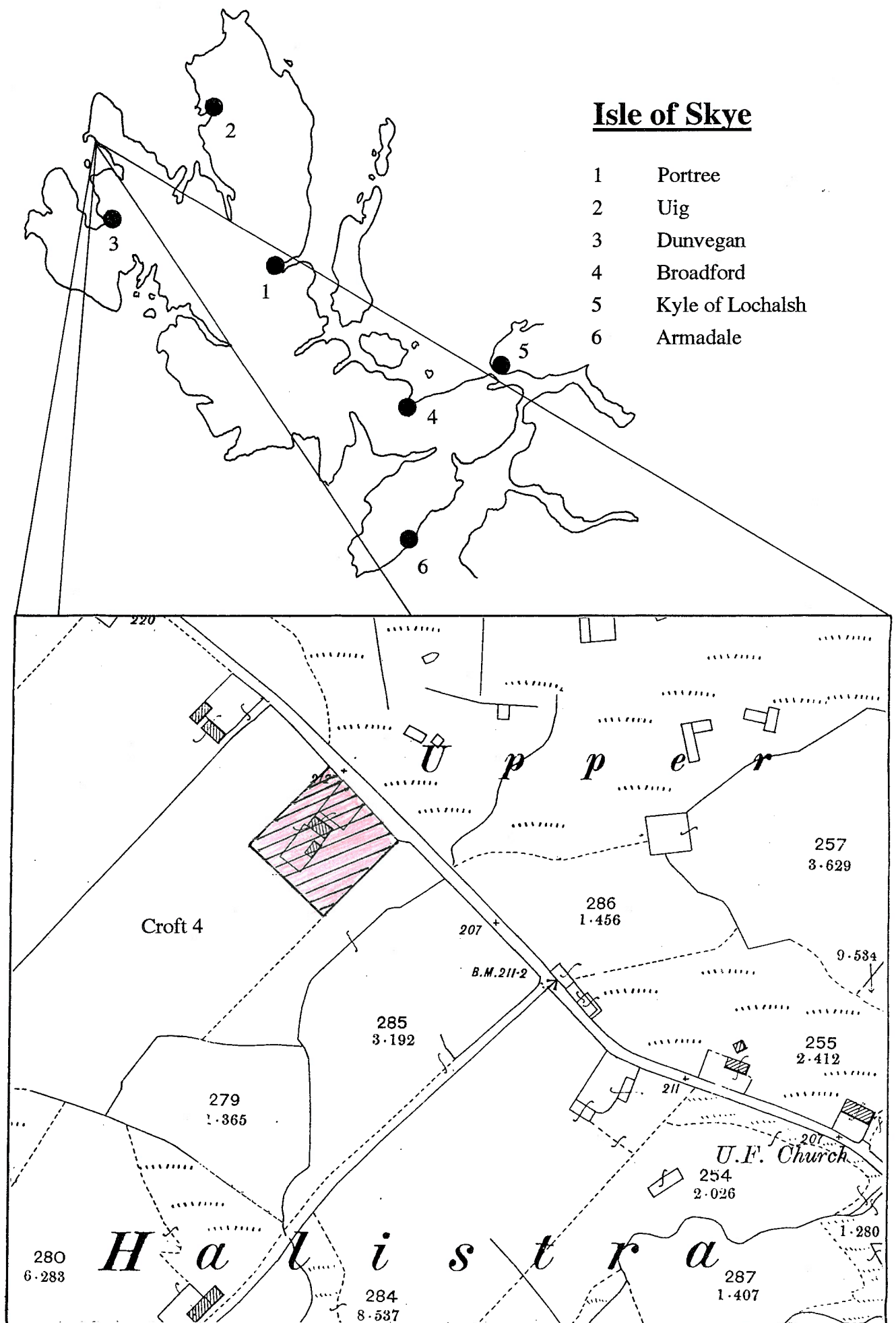
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illus. 1 Location of Croft 4, Halistra.

**A survey, and watching brief, of the standing buildings and associated yards prior to and during demolition and redevelopment.**

### **SUMMARY**

The recording and survey of the standing remains of the croft house and associated structures and yards was carried out over a period of 10 days between the 23rd of January and the 2nd of February 1998. The remains of three structures and two yards were recorded, at a scale of 1:100, along with all associated earthworks, up to and including the standings for two mobile homes. An overall plan of the site was also produced, at a scale of 1:200, showing the spatial relationships of all of the remains. In addition the standing wall faces of the house and byre were recorded at a scale of 1:20. The work was carried out during a spell of atrocious weather, when barely a day passed without heavy rain and wind.

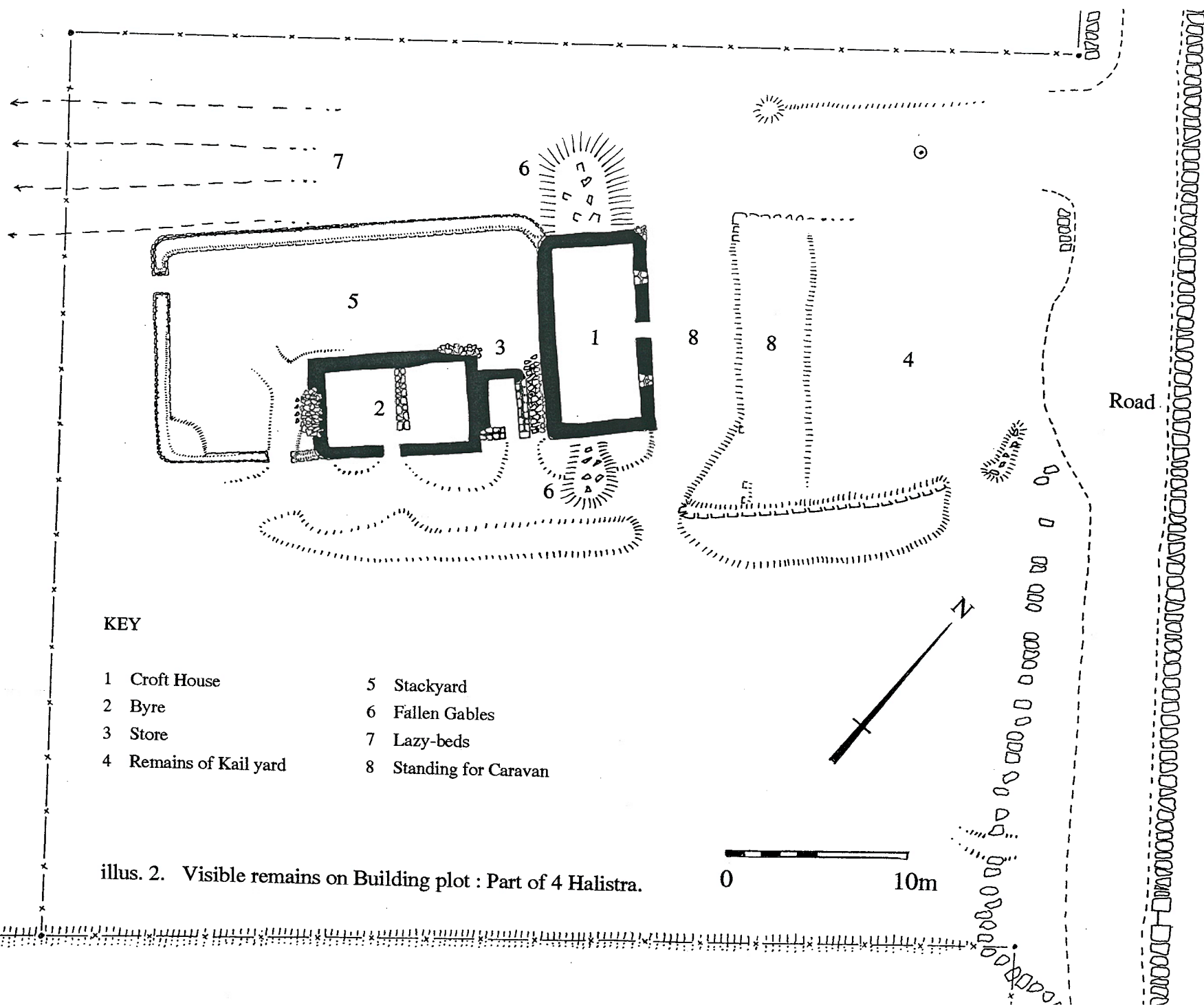
The watching brief was carried out, after some delay, on the 6th and 7th of April 1998. The standing remains of the croft were removed and the site prepared for building works on the 6th and the foundation trenches were dug on the 7th.

All the stone removed was sold on to private individuals and companies for re-use.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Croft 4, Upper Halistra was purchased by Mr Mike Wotton of 58 Hinton Road, Northampton, the intent being to build a new dwelling house and to retain the standing buildings as features within the garden area. This plan was changed towards the end of 1997, the new plan being to totally demolish the existing buildings, and to construct two new structures on the site. This being the submitted intent the Highland Archaeologist required that the existing buildings and all related features be recorded prior to the start of site works. Once site works had started a watching brief was to be maintained during demolition of the existing buildings and site preparation for the new structures and their associated services. The following report details the results of the archaeological recording and watching brief.

A copy of the specification for the archaeological recording and watching brief is included as appendix A at the back of the report.

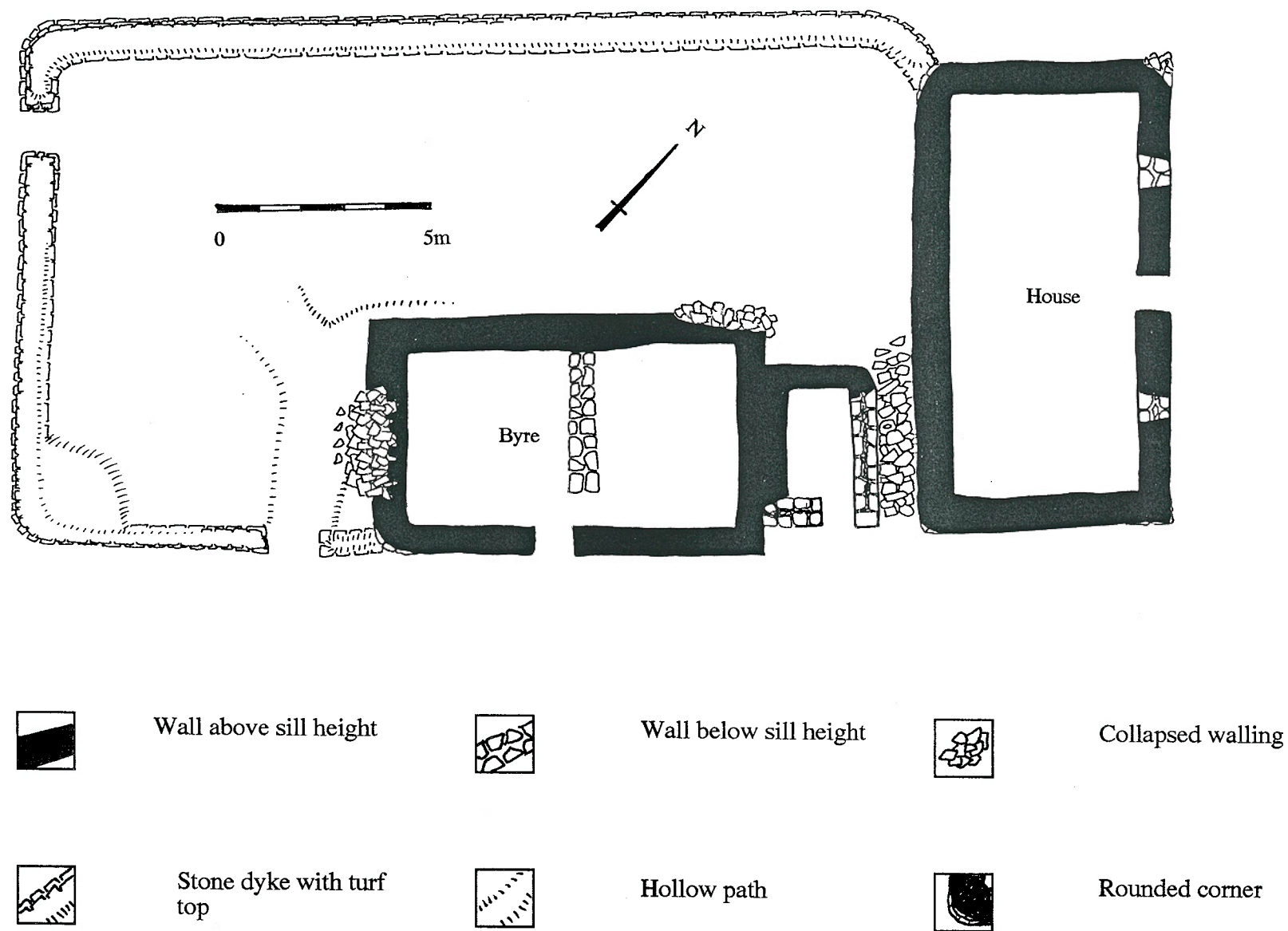


KEY

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Croft House          | 5 Stackyard            |
| 2 Byre                 | 6 Fallen Gables        |
| 3 Store                | 7 Lazy-beds            |
| 4 Remains of Kail yard | 8 Standing for Caravan |

illus. 2. Visible remains on Building plot : Part of 4 Halistra.

0 10m



illus. 3. Detail : Standing remains, Croft 4 Halistra.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The building plot in question measures some 50.00m square and is situated in the upper, north-east corner of croft 4 Upper Halistra, on the Isle of Skye. A new post and wire fence encloses the plot. The plot butts up to the south-west side of the existing township road.

Within the confines of the plot are the remains of three stone buildings :-

1. The croft house.
2. A byre.
3. A small store or hen shed.

All three structures are drystone built, are of locally won stone which has been rough dressed on one face. Almost all the pins have dropped out of the wall faces leaving voids between the facing stones. The wall cores are filled with soil, small stones and chipping's from the dressing of the facing stones. To the north-east of the buildings, extending from the front of the house up to the road are the remains of a small enclosure, probably a kailyard or garden. To the south west of the buildings, and partly enclosing the byre, is a well preserved enclosure, perhaps a stackyard. To the south-west of the stackyard are the vague outlines of three lazy beds or perhaps cultivation riggs, these pass under the wire fence into the retained croft land beyond. All these elements are described in detail below.

### **1. The house**

Building 1, the former house, lies on a north-west to south-east alignment and faces the road, being some 23.00m distant from the road edge. The building measures 10.90m by 6.00m over walls 0.80m thick. The walls survive to an external maximum of 1.80m at the north-east corner and to an internal maximum of 1.60m, also at the north-east corner. The north and east corners are squared externally. The south and west corners are rounded externally. All the internal corners are squared and well knitted together indicating a building of single period construction. The interior is part filled with a mixture of rubble from the wall heads and domestic rubbish. The north-east facing wall (front) has a central door opening 0.75m wide flanked on both sides by well made window embrasures. The western window embrasure measures 0.75m wide on the internal face and 0.56m on the external face. The lintel is missing, it was not possible therefor to measure the full height. The eastern window opening measures 0.66m wide on the internal face and 0.60 on the external face. Again the lintel is missing. Both windows are 0.65m above the present ground surface. At both ends of the house, piled against what remains of the gable walls are large, grassed over, heaps of building stone and rubble. These heaps of stone may represent the collapsed upper gables. There are no fire-places or chimneys.

### **2. The byre**

The byre lies at right angles to, and behind, the house, approximately 3.25m to the south-west. The front wall of the byre is aligned with the south-east gable wall of the house. This building is dry-stone built and measures 9.20m by 5.80m over walls 0.85m thick. The walls stand to a maximum of 1.60m in most parts. The outer faces of the north corner and the south-west end have collapsed. The walls are faced with semi-dressed stone and the core of the walls is packed with small stones and chipping's. The north, east, and west external corners are squared the south external corner is rounded. All the internal corners are squared and well knitted together. A single entrance, 0.95m wide, lies in the centre of



the south-east wall. The interior of the byre is divided into two unequal sized rooms by a centrally placed partition wall, on a north-west to south-east alignment, 0.80m thick. This partition is now mostly collapsed. The south-western compartment measures 4.10m by 3.75m, the north-eastern compartment 4.10m by 3.25m. An entrance 0.80m wide lies at the south-east end of the partition, giving access to the north-east compartment. The south-west compartment is filled, to a depth of 0.50m, with pieces of a damaged caravan. The northern compartment is clear. The lack of collapsed stone at the gables may perhaps indicate a half timbered end or perhaps a hipped roof.

### **3. Store / Hen shed**

Lying between the house and the byre, and butted up to the end wall of the byre, is a small dry-stone built structure which measures 2.50m wide by 3.70m long. The walls are 0.45m thick on three sides, the exception being the south-east wall which is 0.75m thick. The south-east wall is mostly taken up by a door opening 0.80m wide. The walls stand to a maximum of 1.10m. The narrow, (0.80m wide), passage between the store and the rear wall of the house is filled with debris from the collapsed upper part of the walls.

### **4. Kailyard.**

To the front of the house, and extending from house to road, are the remains of an enclosed yard or garden which measures 23.00m from the house to the road by 16.00m wide at the house end narrowing to 14.00m at the road end. Only the south-east wall survives to a sufficient height to allow the width of the wall to be measured. On this side the wall is 0.60m thick and stands to only two courses high (0.30m). The remaining three sides of the enclosure have been destroyed during the construction of two caravan standings, (see below) and a car parking area. A possible entrance, 2.50m wide, survives at the east corner of the enclosure.

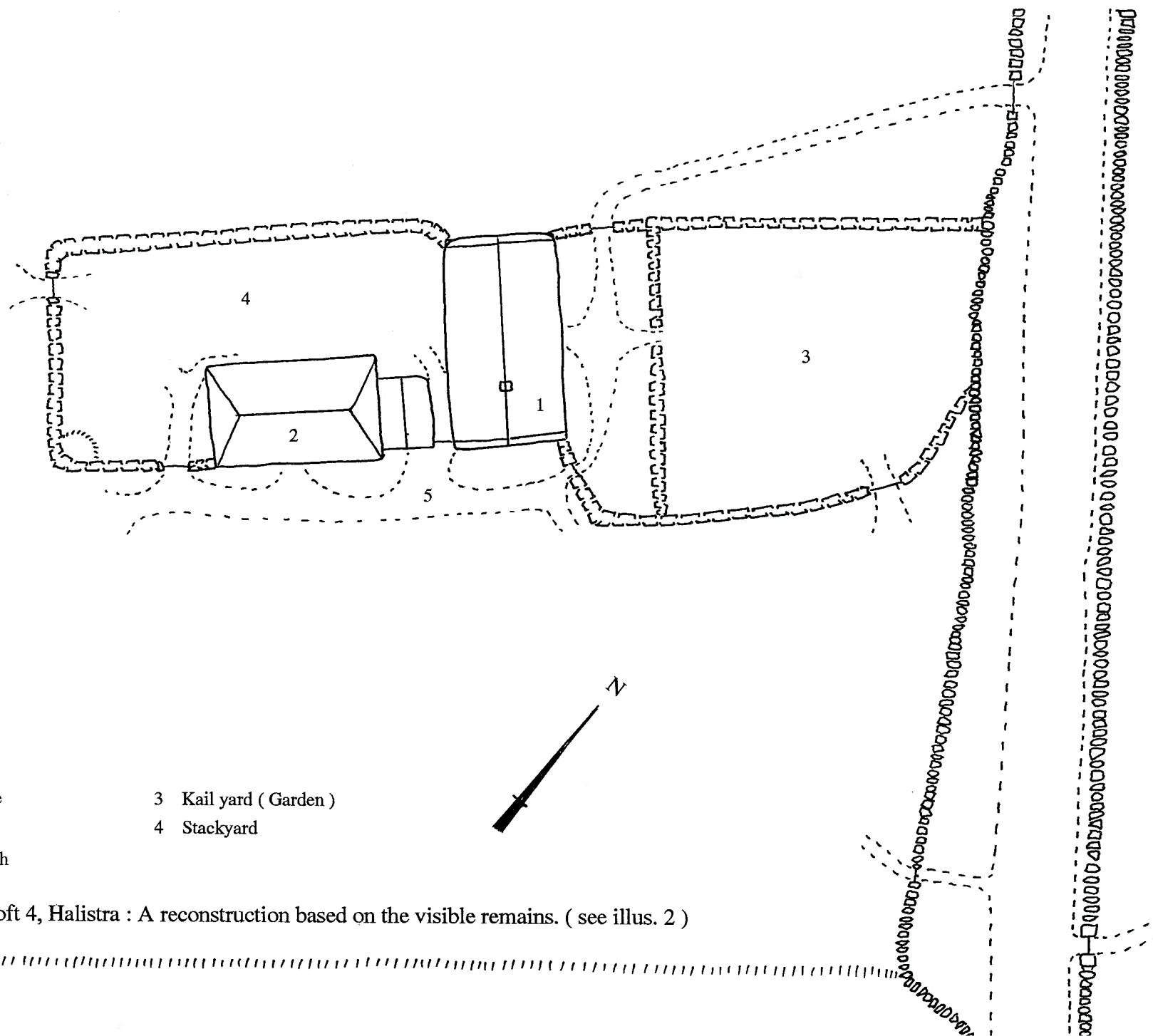
### **5. Stackyard**

To the rear of the house and part enclosing the byre is a well preserved enclosure. This enclosure, which measures 21.00m north-east to south-west by 12.50m north-west to south-east, is surrounded by a stone wall 0.70m thick and 0.75m high on its outer face. The interior face is now level with the interior ground surface which is raised some 0.30m above the outer ground surface. There are three entrances into the stackyard, all are well preserved and appear to be original features. At the south-west end of the byre is an opening 1.20m wide. A shallow, sunken path passes through this opening. At the west corner of the enclosure is an opening 0.90m wide, this also has a shallow sunken path running through to the interior. Between the house wall and the small store is a narrow passage some 0.80m wide. A shallow sunken path leads to the outer end of this passage, this may indicate a third entrance into the stackyard.

### **6. Cultivation.**

Lying on a south-west to north-east alignment, close to the west corner of the stackyard are the vestigial remains of 3 lazy-beds/ cultivation riggs. The distance between the shallow furrows is 2.00m, narrowing slightly as they approach the corner of the stackyard. It is difficult to tell if these remains are contemporary with, or pre-date the stackyard. These 3 isolated features continue in a south-westerly direction where they pass under the building plot fence eventually fading away some 20.00m into the retained croft lands. The open south-eastern half of the building plot, surprisingly, contains no traces of cultivation.

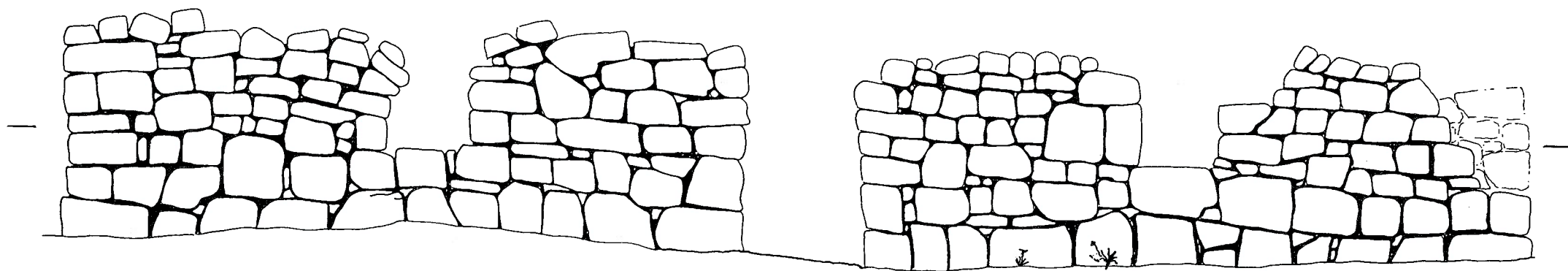




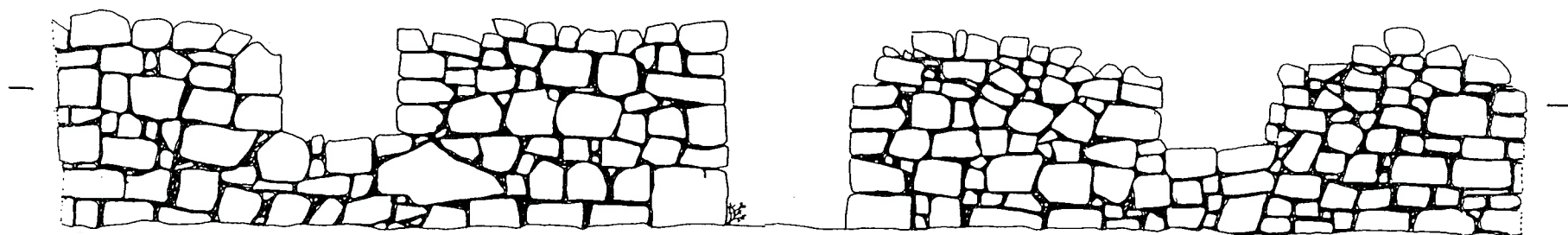
# KEY

- |                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 1 Croft House  | 3 Kail yard ( Garden ) |
| 2 Byre         | 4 Stackyard            |
| 5 Cobbled path |                        |

illus. 4. Croft 4, Halistra : A reconstruction based on the visible remains. ( see illus. 2 )

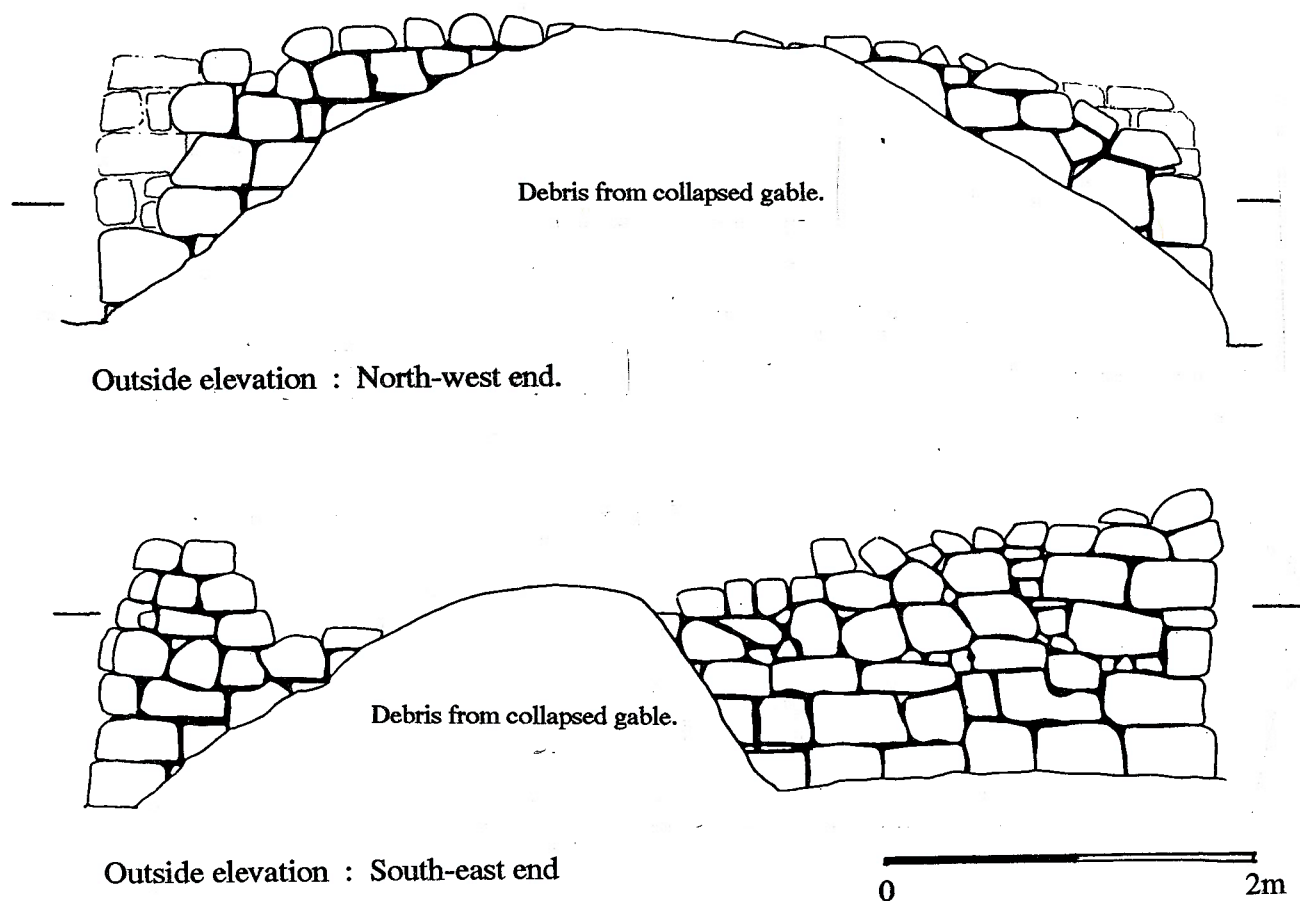


Outside elevation.



Inside elevation.

illus. 5. Detail : North-east wall of croft house. ( front )

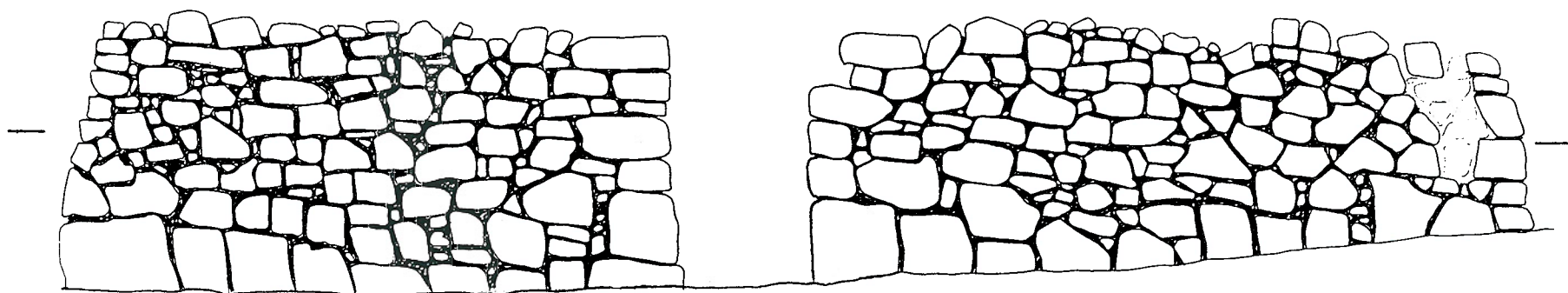


illus. 6 Detail : Gables of croft house.

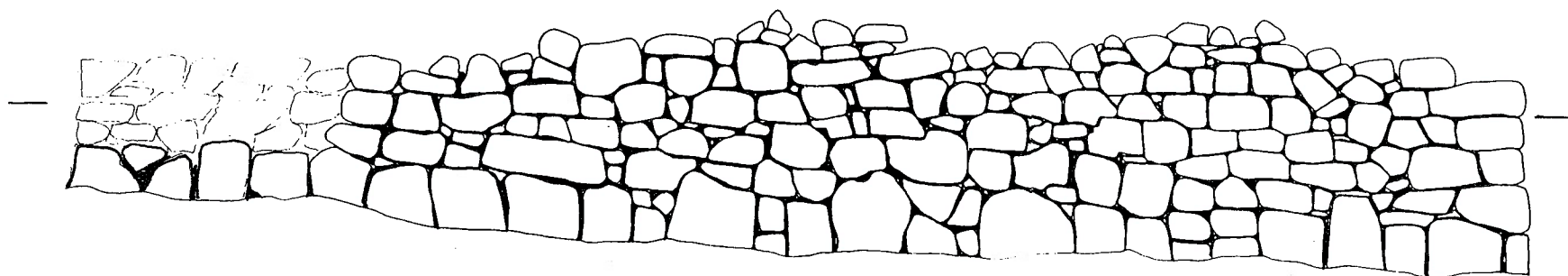
### Caravan standings.

Lying immediately to the north-east side of the house, destroying all traces of the original features between the house and the kailyard, and overlying the south-west wall of the kailyard, are two excavated caravan standings. These standings lie parallel to the house and measure 10.00m long by 4.50m wide. The remains of a burnt-out caravan lie on the standing nearest the house. The area between the caravan standings and the road, covering all the interior and north-west side of the kailyard, has been overlaid with stone chipping's, providing parking space for the caravans.

The remains of a second burnt-out caravan lie immediately to the front of the byre.



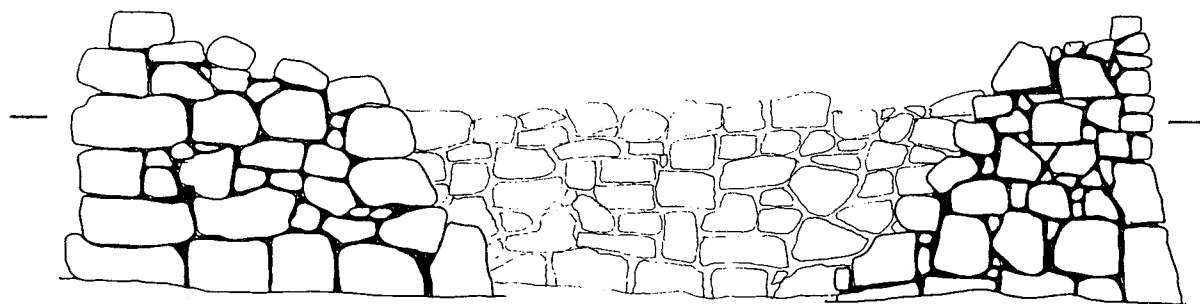
Outside elevation : South-east wall ( front )



Outside elevation : North-west wall ( back )

0 ————— 2m

illus. 7 Detail : Walls of byre.



Outside elevation : South-west end

## **WATCHING BRIEF**

### **Summary**

A watching brief was maintained during the demolition and removal of the standingcroft buildings, the leveling and preparation of the site and the excavation of the foundation trenches.

## **RESULTS**

### **1. The House**

The demolition and clearance of the house revealed that this building had no true foundations, the larger boulders visible at the foot of the wall being the only concession to any sort of footing. These footings were placed directly on the surface of the sub-soil after removal of a thin layer of top soil. There had been no appreciable movement of these footings.

The core of the wall was seen to be composed of a dry, orange brown, friable soil mixed with small stones. Very few dressings were present either in the core or on the surrounding ground surface, this would seem to indicate that the wall stone was either cut and dressed away from the site - perhaps at the quarry or that it had been robbed from an older structure.

The missing window and door lintels were not found in the rubble lying in and around the house. These lintels may have been either of wood or stone, and have subsequently been robbed away for use elsewhere or, in the case of wood, have perished.

The piles of stone and earth seen lying against the outer face of both gables proved to be composed of a mixture of dressed stone, small stone and the friable earth found in the wall cores. This is entirely consistent with them being derived from the collapse of the upper gables.

There were no traces of a hearth or occupation surfaces within the building.

There were no traces of paved or cobbled surfaces to the north-east (front) of the house. These may have been removed by the site preparation for the caravan standing placed at this side of the house.

A dump of whisky bottles and recent rubbish was found just out-with the west corner of the house. Besides bottles, this dump contained transistor radio's, pots and pans and other domestic rubbish of a type and date consistent with a post 1960 deposition. None of this material was retained.

### **2. The Byre**

The demolition of the byre revealed that this building, as the house, had no foundations and had been built directly on the surface of the sub-soil without the benefit of foundation trenches. The footings at the centre of the south-west end and at the north corner had slumped slightly outwards. This slumping may have caused the collapse of the walls at these points. The core of the byre walls was different to the core of the house walls, and was composed only of small stones. Again very few dressing were present.

No internal fittings or cattle stalls were seen within the building and the floors were not paved or cobbled, this would seem to indicate a store rather than a cattle byre.

A paved path, leading from the byre/store door to the east corner of the house was revealed during site clearance.

### **3. The Store / Hen shed**

This building also had no true foundations and was built directly on the surface of the sub-soil. The interior had an earth floor. The entire area of the interior was filled, to a depth of several centimetres, with a compacted layer of a mixture of coal dust and small pieces of coal. This was the coal shed prior to abandonment.

### **4. The Kailyard**

No works were carried out within the area of the kailyard. The area had already been leveled and overfilled with hard-core and this was to be retained as an entrance and parking area.

### **5. The Stackyard**

The stackyard was only partially cleared and leveled with some 5.00 meters at the southern end being retained as a garden feature.

The interior of the stack yard was covered with a black, humus rich, soil to a depth of 300mm in some places. This greater depth of soil was probably derived from the decay and leveling of stored hay and straw, (stacks), within the yard. Interestingly there were no stack stands, either of stone or wood, within the leveled area.

### **6. Cultivation**

The 3 cultivation riggs at the west corner of the stackyard were not disturbed.

#### **Note.**

Very little pottery was recovered during the site works. A single sherd of a cream ware plate of mid 19th century date was recovered from the footings of the house wall. The nature of the demolition however means that this sherd can not be considered as securely stratified. Only a further 14 small sherds of mostly cream wares and under-glaze transfer decorated wares, all of mid 19th century date or later, were recovered from in and around the buildings. This is unusual for Skye where sites of this period tend to be littered with broken pottery. A single sherd of a hand painted, under glaze vessel may be earlier than mid 19th century date. This was recovered from a wheel rut 20.00 meters to the south-east of the house and may relate to an earlier period of activity in the area.

#### **Excavation of the foundation trenches.**

The foundation trenches were dug, by excavator, on the 7th of April and an inspection was carried out on the evening of the same day. The inspection was carried out by Roger Miket, who lives close by, on my behalf, as the builders expressed some urgency and a desire to start pouring the concrete footing early the next day. There were no archaeological features visible in the sides of the trenches and the builders were allowed to proceed.



## Conclusions

The buildings on croft 4 appear, from available evidence, to be of one period and to have been conceived and constructed, as a single unit, around the middle of the 19th century on a green field site. All three buildings were built directly on the surface of the sub-soil with no true foundations. This lack of true foundations is a common feature in the area and has been noted at a number of buildings of a similar date.\* The house would appear to have had stone gables and a ridge roof, the byre either wooden upper gables and a ridge roof or a hipped and ridged roof. There is no evidence for how the Store/Hen shed was roofed.

The relative absence of domestic pottery on and around the site would seem to indicate the presence of a refuse tip in the close vicinity, this may have been a community dump or simply a dump convenient to croft 4. The small dump of bottles and electrical and other domestic items found at the north-west corner of the house, many of which showed signs of fire damage, probably originated from a clearance of the burnt out caravans which lay to the north-east of the house and south-east of the byre .

( see illus. 4 for a possible reconstruction of the site.)

\*Drumbuie - An archaeological watching brief. Sept. 1996. Site report. M.Wildgoose

Drumbuie - Excavation of Structure 117. Nov. 1997 Site report. M.Wildgoose

Beaton's Cottage, Borneskitaig. The recording of a mechanically dug service trench.  
Jan. 1998. Site report. M.Wildgoose

END

MW 8/4/98

All records and site drawings are held within the archive of M.Wildgoose  
Tigh an Dun  
Dunan  
Broadford  
Isle of Skye IV49 9AJ  
Tel. 01471 822 562

Retained records include :-

Site drawing on film of the buildings and yards @ 1:100

Site drawing on film of all features on the building plot. @ 1:200

Detailed site drawings on film of the house and byre wall faces @ 1:20

Written site notes relating to the plans

16 sherds of glazed pottery as listed in the text.



## SLIDE INDEX

1. Struct. 1, N-E wall, outside elevation.
2. Struct. 1, S-E gable, outside elevation.
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4. Struct. 1, N-W gable, outside elevation.
5. Struct. 1, N-E wall - S-E end of, inside elevation.
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21. Site cleared, from S-W. Figure is standing on the site of the store/hen shed.

Scale in photographs = 2 meters in 20cm divisions.

## **Appendix A**

### **Specification - Recording and Watching Brief**

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**Cultural and Leisure Services**  
**ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE**

**Specification for archaeological work  
prepared for Mr M. Wotton**

**4 Upper Halistra, Waternish, Isle of skye**

**Archaeological Recording and Watching Brief**

### **Terms of Reference**

This specification is for archaeological recording work at 4 Upper Halistra, occasioned by planning application no SL/97/36. It is based on these documents. If these details are changed a new specification will be needed. It is valid until March 1998 after which if no work has been carried out a revised specification will be needed.

The specification has been produced for Mr M. Wotton who will be responsible for the work, including all tendering and contractual arrangements. Estimates should be obtained from archaeological contractors on the basis of this specification. It is for a *minimum* standard of work; a higher standard may be offered and accepted.

Any reference to 'archaeologist' in this specification is to be taken to mean a qualified and experienced practitioner acceptable to the Highland Archaeologist. This is to ensure that work is carried out to professional standards. The project should be carried out by, or under the immediate direction of, a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists or an archaeologist of equivalent standing.

If this is for a road or water or sewerage proposal the area to be covered is the entire wayleave except where otherwise indicated.

### **Objectives**

1. To record, to professional standards, any features and objects of archaeological importance that will be damaged or destroyed by this development.

### **Method**

Thecrofting buildings on site which are to be demolished must be recorded prior to demolition, using measured analytical survey and photography. All interior and exterior walls must be included, and a full ground plan produced. Details of construction methods and materials should be described and any later additions, demolitions or modifications

noted. The scale of this drawing should be at 1:100. Photographs should be colour slides and illustrate all features of the building.

A watching brief will be conducted by an archaeologist on all site groundworks so that any finds or features of importance can be recorded to professional standards.

Those carrying out site works will need to work closely with the archaeologist and provide all necessary access and other arrangements

Where this is a watching brief for road, water, or sewerage proposals the specification includes drainage and other ancillary works as well as the carriageway itself.

### **Monitoring**

1. The Highland Archaeologist will normally monitor projects to ensure that specifications are met.
2. Monitoring will normally be by unannounced site visit. Alternative or additional monitoring arrangements may be made in individual cases.
3. Prior notice of fieldwork starting dates, with contact names and local addresses, telephone numbers and directions and other arrangements for access must be given to the Highland Archaeologist.
4. Any unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries, or any other unexpected occurrences or conditions which might affect the agreed project work or its timetable or cost must be notified immediately to the client and the Highland Archaeologist so that revised arrangements can be made.

### **Reporting**

#### **1. Project report**

At least FOUR copies of the project report must be produced.

- \* One copy for Mr M. Wotton, 58 Hinton Road, Northampton NN7 8NX
- \* Two copies for the Highland Sites and Monuments Record, Old School, High Street, Clachnaharry, Inverness IV3 6RB where it will be available for immediate consultation by the public.
- \* One copy to be deposited in the National Monuments Record for Scotland, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX.

The report must be submitted to the Highland Archaeologist within 3 weeks of the completion of field work.

The report must include, as a minimum,

1. Location plan showing the project area and archaeological sites and features affected.
2. OS Grid References, and Parish details
3. Circumstances and objectives of this work, including a copy of this specification.
4. Weather and other conditions affecting fieldwork
5. Plans, drawings and photographs of all archaeological features noted.
6. A full index to any records or other material generated by the project including its location
7. Details of any measures proposed to mitigate the impact of the application on the archaeological resource
8. A brief analysis of the project results drawing in comparative data as appropriate.
9. General comments and proposals for future archaeological projects arising from the carrying out of this project
10. A set of catalogued slides detailing the progress of the project

The completed report will be available for immediate public consultation for research purposes at the Highland Sites and Monuments Record.

## **2. Treasure Trove and Museum Procedures**

The Project Director must liaise with the Inverness Museum Assistant Curator, prior to the start of fieldwork, regarding possible emergency conservation needs and future storage. The Project Director must devise a cataloguing system for artefactual material which is compatible with the needs of Inverness Museum, in liaison with the Curator. Any report to the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer must be copied to the Highland Archaeologist.

### **3. Discovery and Excavation in Scotland**

A brief summary of the results must be sent to the Council For Scottish Archaeology for inclusion in Discovery and Excavation in Scotland.

#### **General**

1. The archaeologist appointed must be of a professional standing acceptable to the Highland Archaeologist and must carry out the work according to the Code of Conduct, standards and guidelines of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
2. The archaeologist is responsible for taking all necessary measures to conform with the Health and Safety at Work Acts and be covered by all necessary insurances.
3. The archaeologist must agree a timetable for the work with the client and the Highland Archaeologist
4. The archaeologist appointed will not comment to the press or other media without prior approval from the Highland Archaeologist
5. Proper provision must be made for prevailing weather conditions in northern Scotland

Dorothy M Low  
December 1997

wbspc.doc

Copies of this report sent to :-

1 copy

Mr M. Wotton  
Croft 4, Halistra.

2 copies

The Highland Sites and Monuments Record  
Old School  
High Street  
Clachnaharry  
Inverness

1 copy

National Monuments Record for Scotland  
John Sinclair House  
16 Bernard Terrace  
Edinburgh