

# The Bothy, Canna

## Archaeological Recording



10<sup>th</sup> December 1997

KIRKDALE

ARCHAEOLOGY

### **Acknowledgements**

Kirkdale Archaeology would like to thank the residents of Canna, in particular Robin Wilkie, the Island Postmaster, and Alec, yewsman and hospitable host.

The recording was carried out by David "Rat" Connolly (Graphics, *Backtrack Design*), Andrew Hollinrake (Photography) and Andrew Dunn (Contexts). The report text is by Andrew Dunn, with illustrations by David Connolly and photographs by Andrew Hollinrake. Measured plans and elevations were provided by Frank Burstow, and were annotated during the survey.

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Kirkdale Archaeology was commissioned to undertake the archaeological recording of a part of the building now known as 'The Bothy' (NG 2750 0549, Figs. 1 & 2) in advance of refurbishment. Two thirds of the building is presently unroofed, and it was this unroofed component which was to be recorded in detail. Excavations to facilitate better drainage for the structure and surrounding area were also planned, affecting the areas to the N and W of the unroofed building, and an assessment of the archaeological potential in these areas was therefore required. In addition, a cursory review of the building known as 'Point House' on neighbouring Sanday (NG 2745 0491, Figs. 1 & 11-15) was undertaken, involving a brief descriptive account and general photographic coverage of the external elevations. The results of the Point House exercise are presented in Appendix 3.

The work was conducted over five days from 19-23.5.97.

**1.1 SITE LOCATION (FIG. 1)**

The Bothy lies on the SE side of Canna, to the W of the headland of Rubha Carr-Innis, which provides Canna with a well-sheltered harbour. The isle of Sanday, opposite the harbour, can be reached at low tide on foot across the mud flats, and the deeper water lies to the E around the point of Rubha Carr-Innis, where the ferry now puts in.

The building lies below the 10m contour, directly on the shore, on the N side of the metalled roadway running from the ferry jetty at the end of Rubha Carr-Innis to Sanday (via a footbridge) and as far as Tarbert to the W.

To the rear of the Bothy stands the 19th-century mansion of Canna House, the successor to the Bothy (Coroghon House) as the residence of the island's owners. The later house stands on a higher terrace than the Bothy, the intervening ground having been altered somewhat to form the gardens of the 19th-century house.

**1.2 GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

"Most of Canna consists of a succession of Tertiary basaltic lava flows, with some interbedded coarse conglomerate and agglomerate, which has been intruded by a number of dolerite sills that have cooled in sheets parallel to the flows. The interlayered basalt flows and dolerite sills have produced the island's terraced topography" (Pattison, in Campbell 1984; 291).

Stone building material is readily available on the island, in the form of basalt and dolerite boulders weathering from the exposed cliff faces, and also in the form of glacial erratics, although these are less common. The Bothy is built from the locally

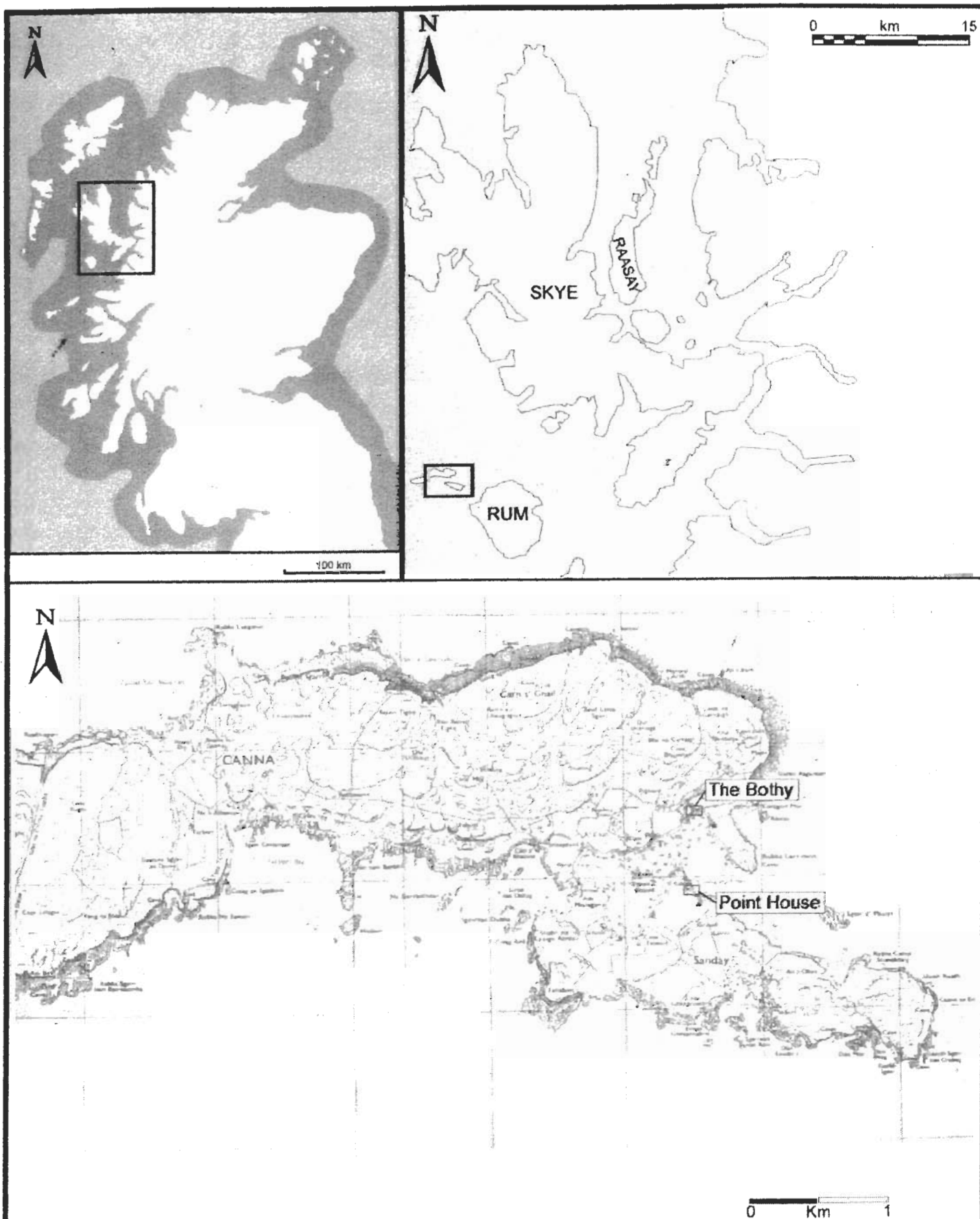
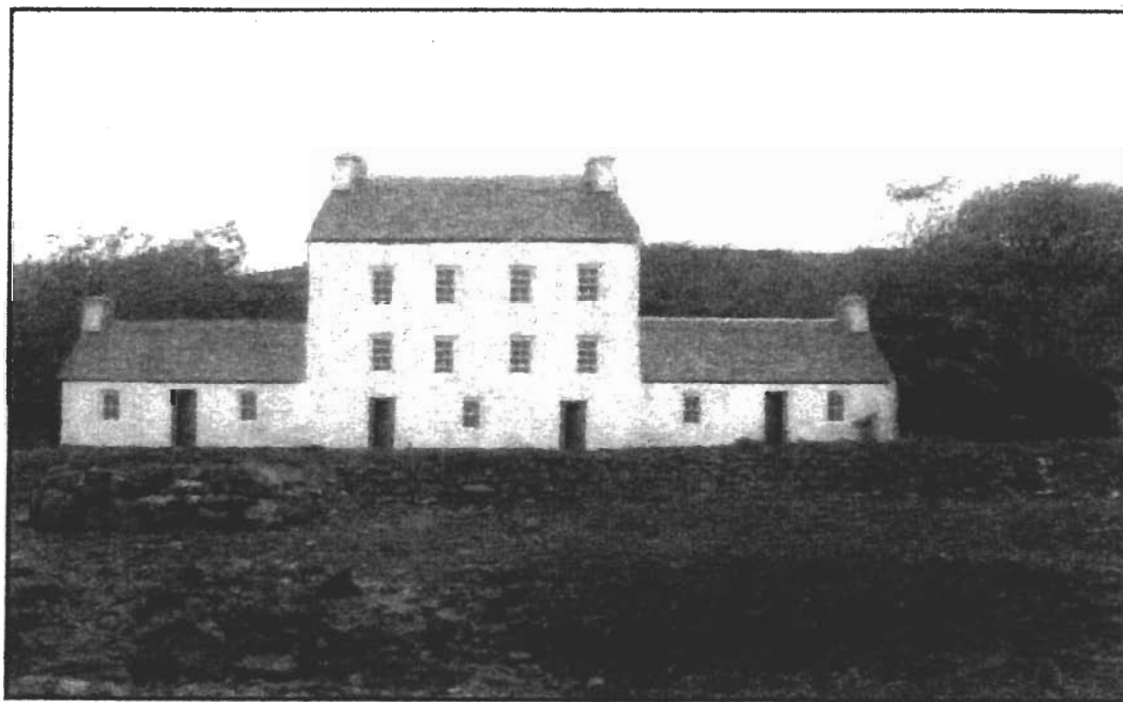


Fig. 1 : Site Locations (map reproduced from OS Sheet NG20, Canna)



**Fig. 2 : The Bothy from the S**



**Fig. 3 : Reconstruction of Coroghon House**

available doleritic and basaltic materials, with door and window jambs, sills and lintels utilising flatter (?quartzite) stones. The area to the N of the Bothy, now comprising the gardens of Canna House, lies on the first of the sill terraces above the 10m contour.

### 1.3

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE BOTHY

The definitive account of Canna is given by Campbell (1984), and this provides the background historical information relating to the Bothy survey. According to Campbell, "... there is indisputable evidence that this house must have been built between 1781, when Hector MacNeill got his first lease of the island from Clanranald, which stipulated that he should build such a house, and 1787, when the first report of the British Fisheries Society stated that he had built it." (ibid; 83). However, there is slight evidence that an earlier building may have stood on the site of the present Bothy, as "Black" Donald Clanranald is said to have died in a house on this spot in 1686 (ibid). The late 18th-century building is depicted in a sketch by Lt. Pierce of the British Fisheries Society (1787, Fig. 9), showing it to stand to 1½ storeys to the W and E, and to 3½ storeys in the centre, where the unroofed component of the Bothy now stands (ibid; 46).

Hector MacNeill bought the island from the Clanranald owners in 1827, and it would appear that the Bothy (known as 'Coroghon House') was the principal residence on the island of the owners thereafter, until the building of the new Canna House in 1860. The latter was built by Donald MacNeill, apparently to appease his wife Isabella, who had seen a similar style of house on a visit to Kelvinside in Glasgow, and was desirous of a similar standard of accommodation. It is not clear whether the building stone in the 19th-century house derived from the taking-down of Coroghon House (the new building was not examined in the recent survey).

The 19th-century ownership of the island, both by Clanranald and MacNeill, was generally a period of financial insecurity, epitomised by the leasing of the whole of Canna to John MacLean, a non-resident cattle farmer, in 1850. On his command, the tenants of Canna were cleared *en masse* to Sanday, and most left for the New World in the following year.

In 1881 the island was purchased by Robert Thom, a wealthy shipbuilder from the lowlands, who was able to invest large sums of money in the upgrading of the island facilities (for example the wooden pier built in 1892). It would appear that Thom was responsible for the planting of a screen of trees to the N of the Bothy (S of Canna House) around 1884, and for the building of the saw-pit to the SE of the Bothy on the shore. Saws and other implements were kept in the central compartment of the by now reduced Bothy, and the E wing of the building was used as a dairy (the above

information relating to the Thoms was kindly supplied by Robin Wilkie). In 1938 the island was sold to J.L Campbell, author of the definitive book, and in 1981 the island was acquired by the National Trust for Scotland by Deed of Gift.

## **2.0 SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

Similar, albeit larger-scale surveys have been undertaken recently by Kirkdale Archaeology at Balmacara Square (NTS) and at the Merchant's House, Kirkcaldy (Scottish Historic Buildings Trust). The same methodology was employed in the survey of the Bothy.

Scale drawings of internal and external elevations were made at 1:50, alongside full photographic coverage, designed to allow for subsequent photomontage via *PhotoModeler*, *AutoCad*, *Adobe PhotoShop* or similar if required. In addition all observed features were recorded in a context regime, providing a database of features which could allow for a phased interpretation of the building.

Point House on Sanday was recorded during a single morning visit (20.5.97), when notes were taken, existing elevations annotated and photographs taken; the results are presented in Appendix 3.

All recording was undertaken under natural daylight (in brilliant sunshine, in the event!), with flash photography being employed for the N elevation and the area to the rear of the Bothy. Colour slide and monochrome print film were used.

It should be noted that any features presently obscured by rendering, or otherwise inaccessible, will not have been recorded in the survey, which recorded the building as-seen. No samples were taken, and no finds were removed from the building.

## **3.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS**

The results of the survey of the Bothy are presented in terms of the internal elevations (N, W, E and S), and the external (N & S) elevations (the W external elevation did not display any additional features unrecorded in the internal W gable). Context numbers were assigned sequentially, and the unroofed building was divided into 3 rooms (Room 1 to the W, Room 3 to the E) for the purposes of coded recording.



**3.1 N WALL INTERNAL ELEVATION, S FACING (FIG. 4)**

The N wall comprises randomly coursed angular dolerite and basalt (021), on average 30 x 40 x 10cm. The coursing is generally random, with slightly larger boulders toward the base of the wall in a few places. Much of the stonework is obscured by rendering (016) and whitewash (053). A series of joist holes along the top of the N wall (023-037) indicate the line of the former garret floor. The joists are held in place by packing stones (i.e. they are built into the N wall, as opposed to resting directly on the wallhead. In the absence of a roof, the present wallhead is protected by means of two timber planks lying across the top (022, 110). The two cross walls within the building (043, 046) abut the N wall, and between them there is evidence (N elevation, Room 2) that the wallhead has been rebuilt. A change in build is visible (114), above which the joist holes are narrower and more regular. The former garret floor would have been supported on the joists and on the tops of the cross walls. The N wall in Room 1, to the W of cross wall 043, features a window opening (038) measuring 1.17 x 0.97m wide, being wider internally, and 1.28m high, standing 75cm above the internal ground level. The opening features a wooden frame (039), internal timber lintel (040) and a flat plank sill (041). Attached to the sill, to the E side of the window, and extending to the floor is an iron vice (042), indicating that Room 1 has seen use as a workroom of some kind.

The E side of the N wall (Room 3, N elevation) features a doorway (048) measuring 1.2 x 0.94m wide (wider internally) and 2.1m high. The lower jambs of the door are somewhat irregular, and it is likely that the door has been reworked from a former window in the N wall. At present the opening features a wooden door frame (049), the door being absent, and a concrete step (111) leading into the yard space to the N. Other features in the N wall of Room 3 include further indications of a light industrial use for the unroofed structure (e.g. 050, 051).

The cross walls within the building (Fig. 5), dividing it into three chambers, comprise upright timber posts holding small randomly coursed rubble, with occasional horizontal cross-struts. The whole is rendered externally (except in Room 2) in smooth concrete (052).

**3.2 W WALL INTERNAL ELEVATION, E FACING (FIG. 6)**

The W gable of the Bothy is of similar build to the N wall (001=021), with the stonework being largely obscured at ground floor level by render 016, and partially at 1st floor level by concrete 008, which respects the former location of the garret floor (009). Small dooks along the wall at the boundary between ground and 1st floors indicate the location of further garret floor supports (017-020).

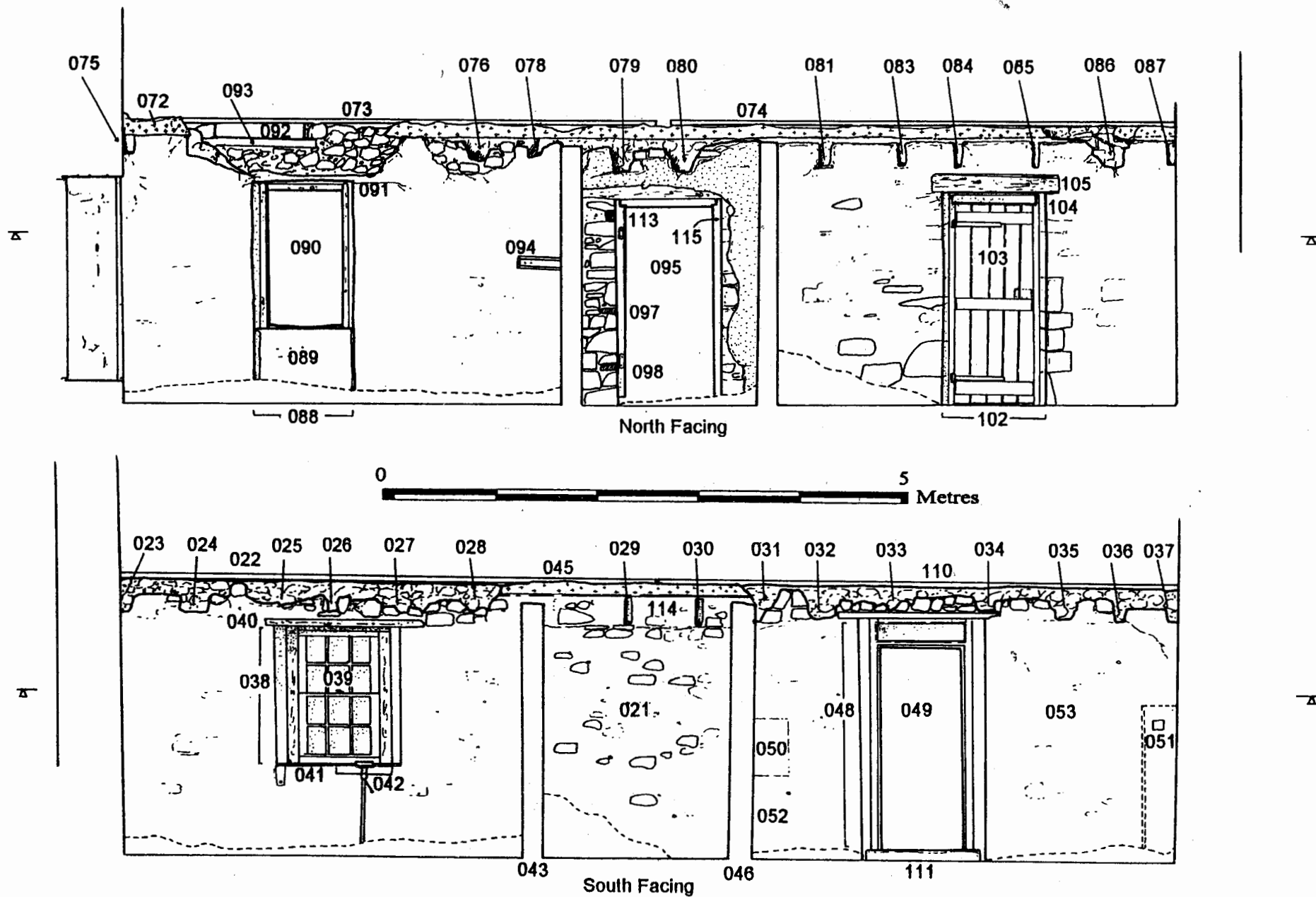


Fig. 4 : Top – Bothy S Wall, N Facing Internal Elevation  
Bottom – Bothy N Wall, S Facing Internal Elevation

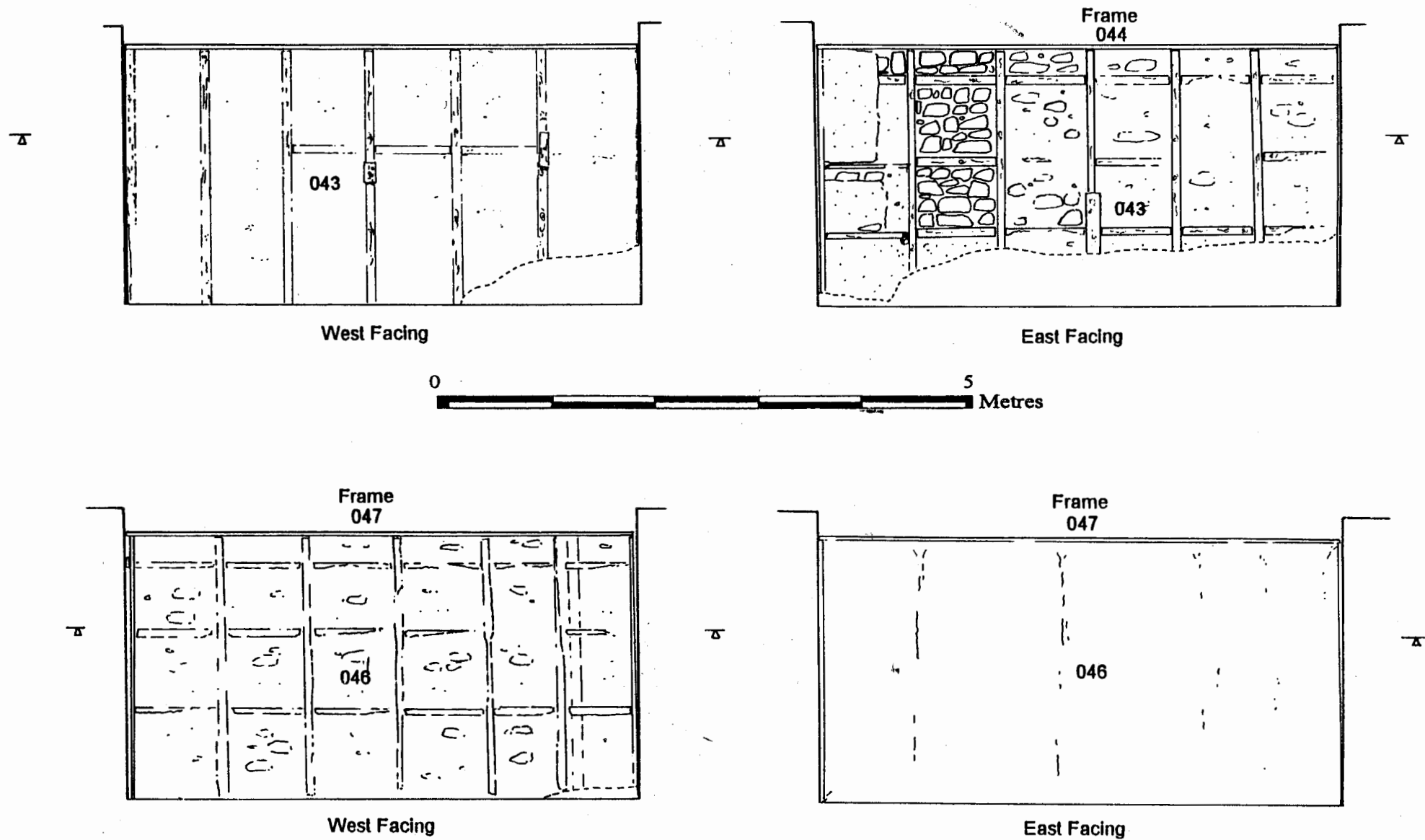


Fig. 5 : Elevations of Cross-Walls in The Bothy

At 1st floor level the gable features a fireplace (003) with a ?quartzite lintel (004) and an iron grate/hearth-plate (005) supported on a large block (006). An iron fitting in the N side internally of the opening indicates the location of a former internal grate or fire-dog (010). A chimney (002) at the top of the gable serves the fireplace.

A series of iron and timber fittings in the W gable internal elevation at 1st floor level were also recorded, forming no coherent patterning, although probably relating to the maintenance of the fireplace (holding cleaning equipment etc.; e.g. 011, 012, 014, 105 in iron, 107-109 in timber).

### 3.3

#### **S WALL INTERNAL ELEVATION, N FACING (FIG. 4)**

The S wall features matching joist holes to those in the N wall (075-087), and again the exposed wallhead is protected by timber planks (073-074) and concrete (072). The S wall is also abutted by cross walls 043 and 046. The fabric of the wall (100) is the same as that of the other walls, and is again obscured by rendering (101) over much of its length. The W side of the internal elevation (S wall of Room 1) features a doorway (102) measuring 0.98 - 0.86m wide (wider internally) and 1.97m high, with a wooden door and frame (103-104) hinged on the E side and opening into Room 1. The doorway also has a wooden lintel (105) internally. A further doorway (095) is evident in the centre of the S wall (S wall, Room 2), measuring 1.01m wide x 1.96m high, and featuring a wooden door frame (the door, now missing, was hinged on the E side and opened into Room 2). This doorway was formed by the reworking and widening of a former window.

The E side of the S wall (S wall, Room 3) features a window opening (090) measuring 1.3m high and 0.82m wide, with a ?quartzite lintel (091). The window is formed by the blocking of a former doorway (088) with coursed rubble (089), the blocking being flush with the external wallface and set back some 20cm from the internal wallface.

### 3.4

#### **E WALL INTERNAL ELEVATION, W FACING (FIG. 6)**

The E elevation features a blocked doorway (066) which would have originally provided access either to the adjoining E range, or to the outside. The fabric of the E wall is obscured by plasterwork (071) and whitewash (053), although the line of the former garret floor is visible as feature 059. Below this line there are two lengths of slightly protruding rectangular stonework, possibly the remnants of former lintels. The southernmost of these (064) stops short of (i.e. respects the location of) the doorway 066. Above the line of the former garret floor is a fireplace (055) with a sandstone/quartzite lintel/relieving block (056) and a void for a former hearth stone or hearth plate (057). The fireplace opening is blocked at its base with rubble (058) which has collapsed from above the original opening. No chimney survives in the E

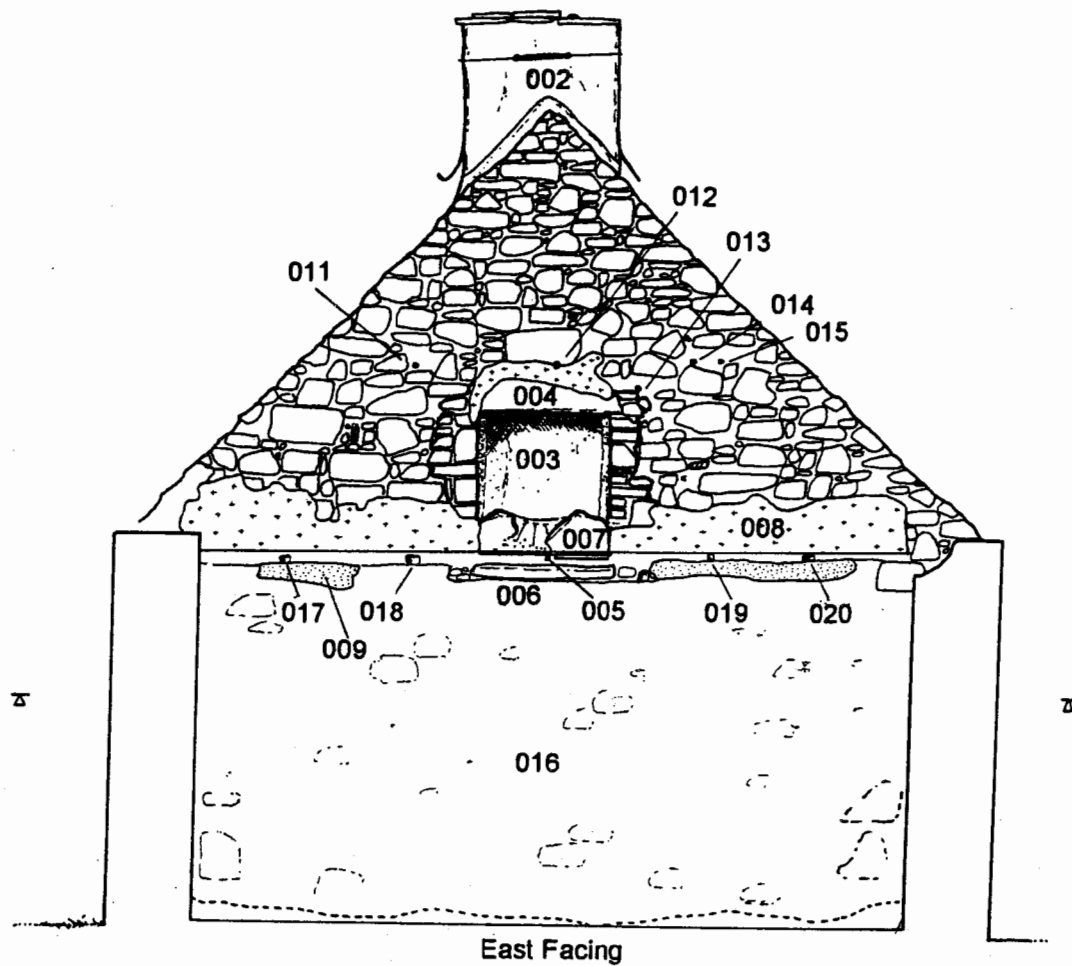
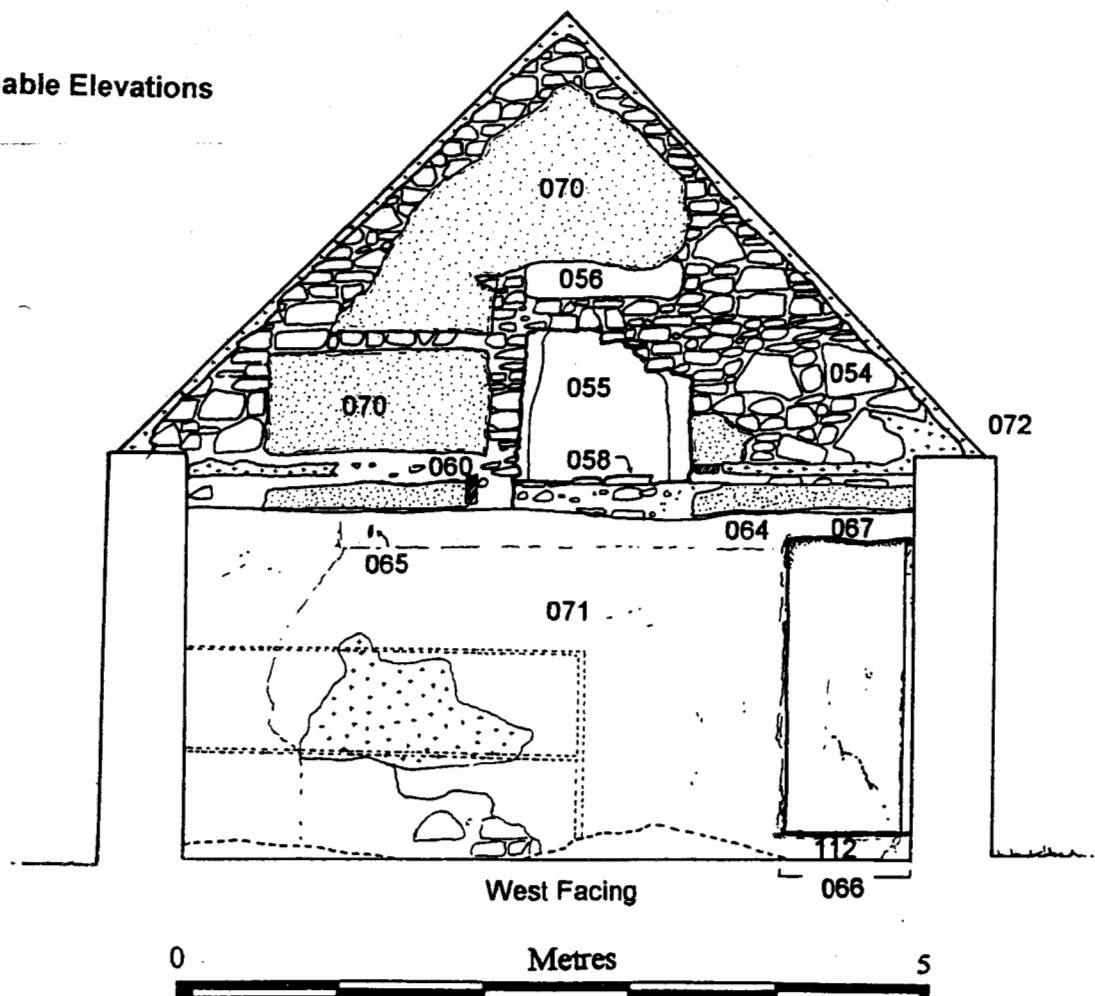


Fig. 6 : Gable Elevations



0 Metres 5

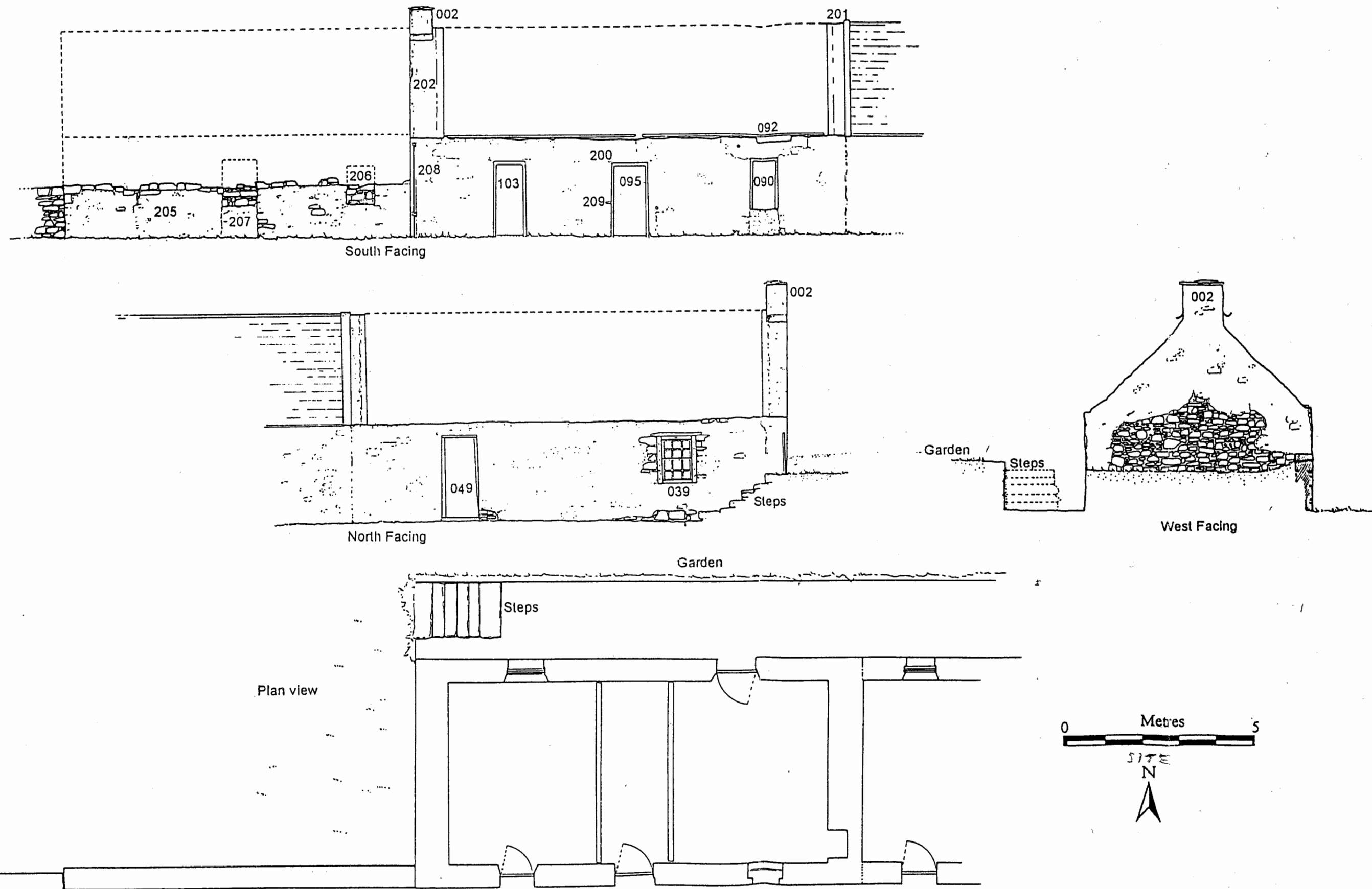


Fig. 8 : The Bothy, External Elevations and Ground Plan

gable of the unroofed Bothy, and the flue serving the fireplace is assumed to have been blocked off, or to be in a state of disrepair. Voids on either side of the fireplace at its base (061 & 062) may have held timbers to secure a fireplace surround, and the removal of such a surround may have caused the damage evinced by 058. An iron fireplace surround (Fig. 7), possibly Georgian in date, was located in the Bothy on arrival, but this is said to have derived from the building destroyed by the explosion of a boiler in 1926 (*pers comm*, Robin Wilkie). However, this grand fireplace surround would have not been out of place in the original house, and it matches in plan and dimensions the fireplace in the E gable. Plaster 070 on the E gable also respects the position of a former fireplace surround around 055.

### 3.5 S WALL EXTERNAL ELEVATION, S FACING (FIG. 8)

The entire S elevation of the Bothy was rendered and whitewashed (200 & 201), obscuring detail of the external stonework. The central unroofed part of the building featured in its S elevation the two doors (103 & 095) and a single window (090) recorded on the S wall internal elevations. Also visible externally to the W of door 095 was a slight change in build (209), taken as further evidence (along with 115) that this doorway has been reworked from a window. The stretch of walling 205 to the W of the unroofed Bothy represents the remains of the W range of the former house, preserving traces of a doorway (207) and a window (206). Other external S wall features included the remains of slate roofing (203) and an iron loop above window 090, which may relate to the iron steps formerly attached to this part of the building.

The fenestration of the S façade was originally regularised, with an alternating pattern of doors and windows (door-window-door etc.). This symmetry has been broken however by the later blocking episodes.

### 3.6 N WALL EXTERNAL ELEVATION, N FACING (FIG. 8)

The N elevation featured doorway 049 and window 039 recorded under the N wall internal elevation. The doorway featured a quartzite lintel externally (219), as did the window (220). An area of brick build at the base of the W side of the doorway (218) is further evidence for the reworking of this door from a window.

To the N (rear) of the Bothy a narrow yard is defined by a stretch of 'L'-shaped mortared walling (222), which abuts the N wall of the Bothy. This features on its W side a set of stone steps (223) providing access to the gardens of Canna House. The location of the stair in Coroghon House is open to question, but it is possible that the steps were reused from this original stair, no longer in use once the upper storeys of the house had been taken down. Their final function was however to provide access to the higher level gardens which were developed when the new Canna House was

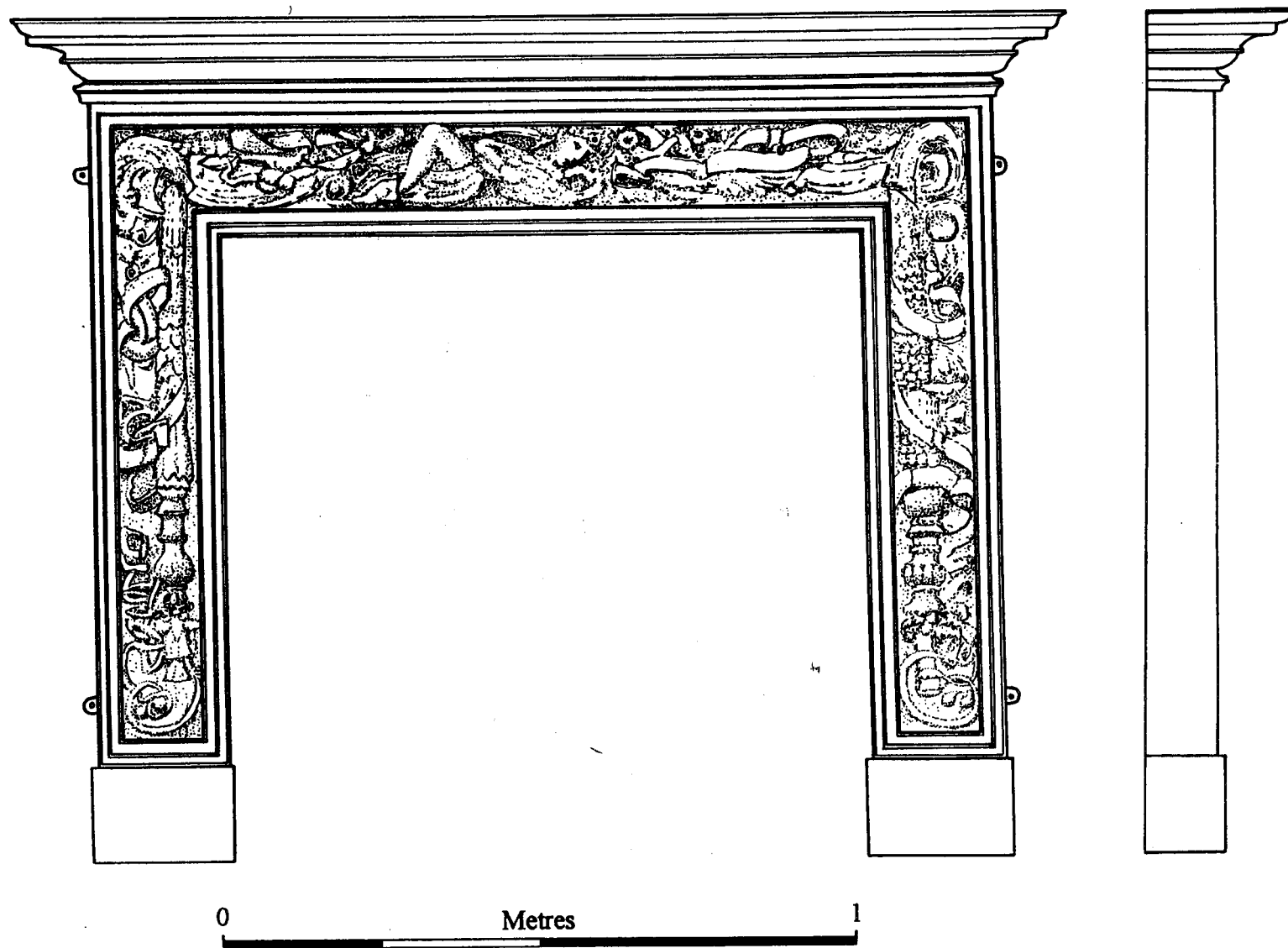
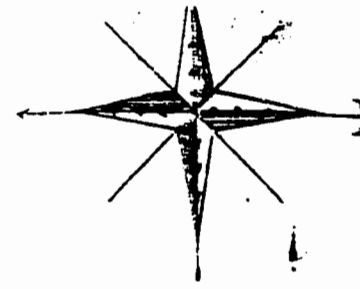


Fig. 7 : The Iron Fireplace Surround



Plan  
 of the HARBOUR of CAHILL  
 With a Survey of two pieces  
 of Ground, offered by  
 (Blennard)  
 To the British Society for  
 Fishing Stations.

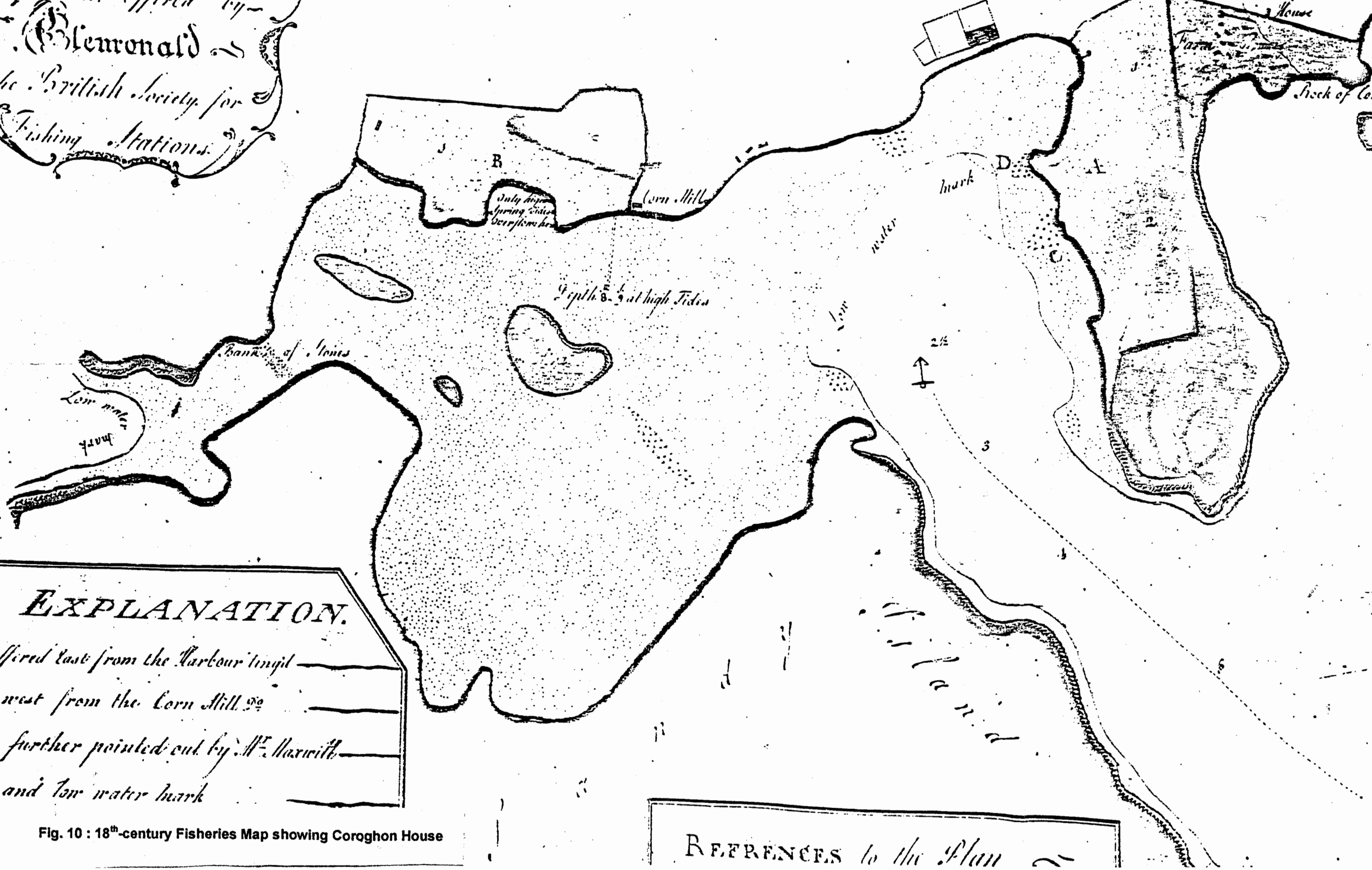
Revised Map copied  
 from the Plan Chart  
 dated 1785 by the Society for



M<sup>r</sup>. Mac Vito's House & Garden

Wilden Mac Leods  
 House

Rock of Co.



### EXPLANATION.

The patch offered east from the Harbour tingit

The patch west from the Corn Mill. 2<sup>o</sup>

The patch further pointed out by M<sup>r</sup>. Mac Vito

the Coast and low water mark

houses.

Fig. 10 : 18<sup>th</sup>-century Fisheries Map showing Coroghon House

REFERENCES to the Plan

built. It is probable therefore that the steps are not presently in their original location, but that they represent recycling of existing stonework when the new house was built.

### 4.0 DISCUSSION

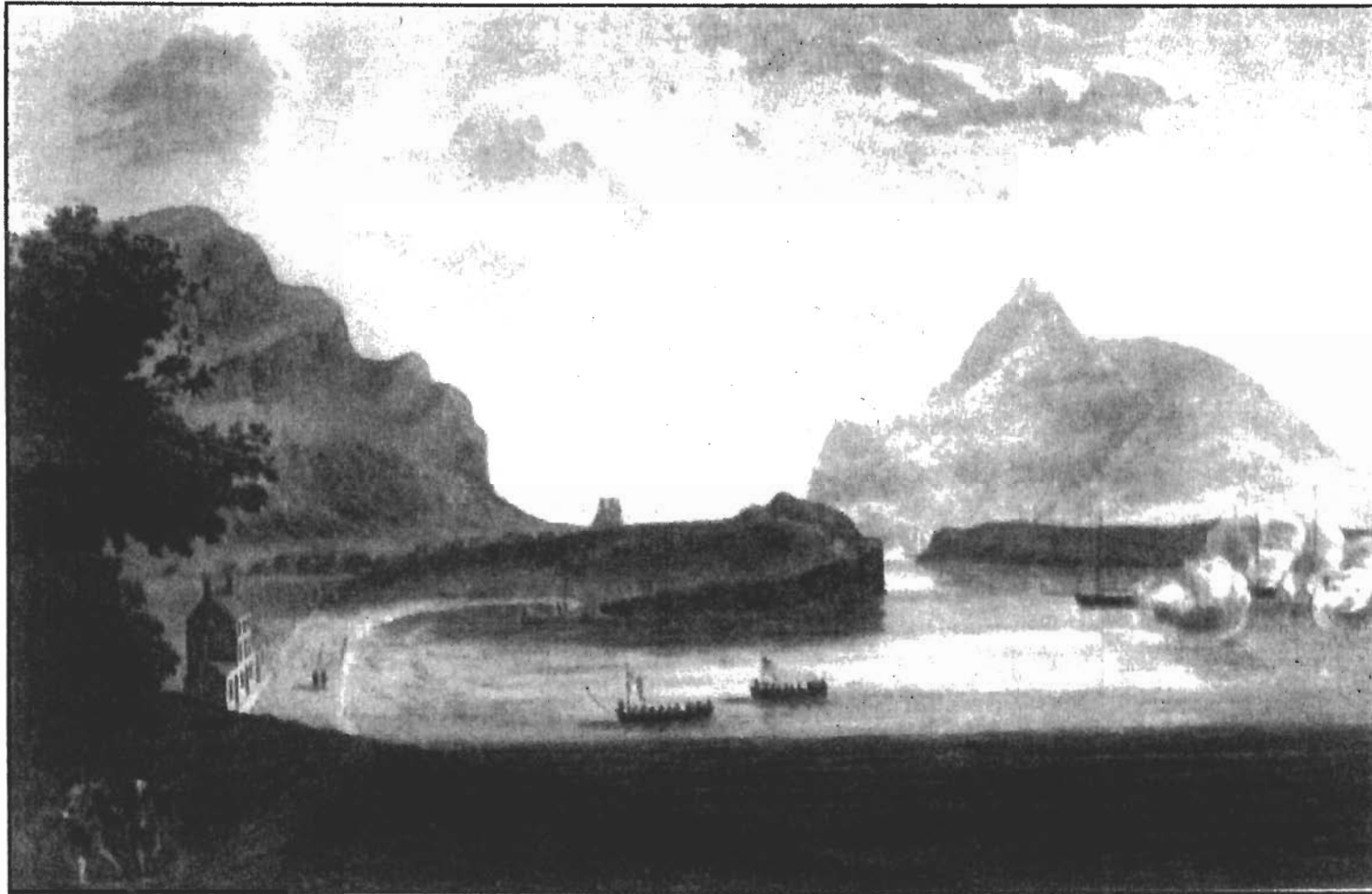
The development of the Bothy from its erection around 1781 to its final state today can be summarised in terms of 5 periods of construction, occupation, use and decline.

#### 4.1 PERIOD 1 : THE HOUSE OF "BLACK" DONALD CLANRANALD "OF THE CUCKOO"

As the W range of the Bothy (205) abuts the W gable, and there is the possibility that the E range is similarly related to the E gable, it is tentatively suggested that the central part of the Bothy represents the remnant of an earlier structure. This may be the house in which "Black" Donald of Clanranald, owner of a gun known as "The Cuckoo" died in 1686 (Campbell 1984; 83). The building of the 1781-7 Old Canna House (see Period 2, below) absorbed whatever remained of the 17th-century house.

#### 4.2 PERIOD 2 : THE BOTHY - 'COROGHON HOUSE', 1781-7 (FIGS. 3, 9 & 10)

As stated above, there is reasonable evidence to confirm that the house was built by Hector MacNeill between 1781 and 1787, MacNeill also building the Changehouse during this period. The house was laid-out as depicted in Lt. Pierce's illustration (Campbell 1984, fig. 1, reproduced here as Fig. 9), with a central part standing higher than either E or W wings. However, the nature of the junction between the walls of the E and W ranges is not clear beneath the present rendering, and it may be that the central component of the house was constructed earlier (see Period 1 above). This may indicate that an earlier house (perhaps that in which "Black" Donald died [see above]) stood in the central area, and was reworked into the new house. No firm archaeological evidence was found for the earlier house, however, aside from the observed fact that the W range S wall (205) clearly abuts the E gable of the present Bothy. The evidence for the original access and fenestration arrangements revealed in the survey, and shown in Fig. 3, is slightly different from that shown in Lt. Pierce's illustration, which was apparently drawn 'from memory' - two doorways lay to either side of a central window at ground floor level in the central part of the house, while the earlier illustration shows only a central doorway in the central part of the building (as the S façade is only partly visible in the sketch, Pierce may not have had the necessary room to draw all windows/doors on this elevation, alternatively he simply forgot the actual details). It should be noted that the only evidence for the house having stood to three storeys high in its central part derives from the late 18th-century sketch - later alterations have removed any archaeological evidence for a formerly



**Fig. 9 : Lt. Pierce's Illustration of Coroghon House, 1787**

higher building. The location of the stair in the Period 2 building is uncertain. A comparable layout is found in the Manse on Eigg (Graham Douglas, *pers comm*, albeit with a central element standing only 2 storeys high), where the stair was incorporated in a projecting rear wing. No evidence for a similar layout for Coroghon House was recorded during the most recent survey. In addition, the contemporary plan (Fig. 10) shows the house to have had narrower wings and a broader central element; this is also contradicted by the recorded structural evidence, although the N wall of the original W wing had been removed or buried beneath garden material when the Period 3 Canna House was erected a short distance to the NW.

Features which belong to this phase include the walls of the Bothy (001, 021, 054, 100), the original doorways and windows (088, 095 [window], 102, 039, 048 [window], 207 and 206), and possibly the fireplaces in the gable walls (003 and 055). The doorway between the Bothy and the E range (066) may also date to the construction of the late 18th-century house.

The house as constructed remained occupied by the principal leaseholders (and eventual owners) of the island until 1860, when the new house was built to the N.

#### **4.3 PERIOD 3 : CANNA HOUSE, 1860**

With the building of the Victorian mansion in 1860, the earlier house was no longer the main residence. The then owner of Canna, Donald II MacNeill, was responsible for the reduction of the central part of the earlier house from 3½ to 1½ storeys, and for the removal in its entirety of the W range. The motive for the removal of the upper part of the earlier house was probably an aesthetic one - it blocked the view of the harbour from the new house (this view was later lost when a line of trees was planted in front of the mansion in 1884). The S wall of the W range was retained as a revetting wall for the gardens of the new house. Stone from the earlier building may have been incorporated into the new house.

Features belonging in the third period include the W gable chimney (002). Further alterations have removed traces of the Period 2 house, which was in all likelihood retained as a domestic residence during this period.

**4.4 PERIOD 4 : THE THOM OWNERSHIP, 1881 - 1938**

After the island had been purchased by Glasgow shipping magnate Robert Thom in 1881, the Bothy appears to have been converted to a store for tools, associated with woodworking activity in relation to the nearby saw-pit, and possibly associated with the boat-building carried out on the dry dock which occupied the island between Canna and Sanday, directly S of the Bothy. The internal division of the ground floor of the Bothy relates to this period, with the insertion of cross walls 043 and 046 at some time during the Thom ownership. The alteration of the fenestration and access arrangements is related to the internal division of the Bothy, and also dates to Period 4. The E range now saw use as a dairy, and the general impression is one of a light industrial, rather than a domestic use for the building.

After the reduction of the Bothy to its present height, a dormer door gave access to the E side of the Garret space via an external iron forestair, surviving as an iron loop in the external elevation (204).

The roof over the Period 4 building had been removed prior to the most recent recording exercise. However, it is reported that "the roof was found to be sarked with very wide irregular timber boards nail-fixed to rafters. These were largely infected with wood boring insect infestation. The infestation holes were very large and indicative of seaworm attack. The wood was probably driftwood salvaged from the seashore" (Donald MacAskill, in correspondence with Robin Turner, 24.8.97). The roofing slates were retained for use when the roof is replaced.

**4.5 Period 5 : Decline post - 1938**

The Bothy appears to have been used as a store for junk and unwanted materials over the recent past, and the structure is presently unroofed in its central part, the roof having been removed in 1996 prior to the restoration of the building by the National Trust for Scotland (for a description of the roof materials, see 4.4 above). This period of decline is provisionally dated to the period up to the acquisition of the island by the National Trust for Scotland in 1981. A programme of restoration and repair is presently underway.

**5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

It is in the context of changing ownership of the island, and the gradual impingement of mainland trends that the Bothy should be considered worthy of preservation. As one of the older houses on the island, it pre-dates the clearances of the 1850s, and is a rare survival from the period when Canna (and later Sanday) supported a much

larger population than it does today. Other pre-Clearance settlement has completely disappeared, including the entire village of Corrogon/Coroghon, of which no surface trace remains.

The Bothy stands therefore as a metaphor for the changes which Canna has endured over the past 1½ centuries, namely changes in ownership and land-use, and its gradual integration into the wider mainland sphere, in terms of its language and economy. Canna has changed from a place where people *live*, to a place where people *visit*, and likewise the Bothy saw change from a building in which people lived, to a store room for woodworking implements.

In summary, the Bothy is an important relic of the island's past, and a rare survival from a time when the life in Canna and the other isles was entirely different from that enjoyed today.

## **6.0 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FUTURE WORK**

The planned drainage works to the N and W of the Bothy will disturb a potentially significant area, namely the remains of the W range, possibly buried beneath the garden make-up revetted by wall 205, the remains of the S wall. It is also anticipated that a part of the S wall will be removed (temporarily) during drainage works. The removal of the part of the wall against the W gable will result in the loss of the archaeological relationship between this wall and the S wall of the unroofed building. However, the present level of recording, coupled with record photographs, should provide an adequate record of the wall as it presently stands. In summary, care should be taken during the excavation of material against the W gable of the building, and the potential for the disturbance of archaeological deposits should be borne in mind.

A further potential for archaeological remains is the possible survival of elements of an earlier house on the site of the Bothy. Excavations to the N and W, below the level of the current floor, may reveal features associated with an earlier structure. As the oldest occupied house on Canna dates to no earlier than the 18th century, earlier houses are of obvious significance for the understanding of the history of the island around the time of the Clearances, the Rebellions of the 18th century, and earlier periods.

In addition, apart from those areas identified above where a specific archaeological implication can be identified, it is important to consider the possibility of sub-surface archaeological deposits in all areas around the upstanding remains (e.g. beneath the

present concrete floor). The nature and extent of any buried archaeological remains could not, of course, be determined in the recent standing building survey.

It is recommended therefore that the ground-breaking works be accompanied by a monitoring exercise.

## **7.0**

### **REFERENCES**

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