

# Threipmuir

## Detailed Site Description by SRP Pentland Hills<sup>1</sup>, 2008-2009

### Introduction

Threipmuir farmstead is situated in improved pasture on the lower slopes of the Pentland Hills, approximately 100m W of the dam separating Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs. The ground slopes gently W and S towards the reservoir giving good natural drainage, but the water table is high and the area SW of the farmstead is particularly wet and marshy. The farmstead is a simple U-shaped Improved 18th century steading, comprising a long, single storey range on the S side with two free-standing outbuildings to the W and E. It is enclosed on its S side by a garden wall which overlies the remains of a larger (earlier) tree-lined enclosure. The larger enclosure overlies a small remnant of rig and furrow, extending S to the reservoir. On its N side, the farmstead is enclosed by a modern fence and there is a small clamp kiln for lime making about 100m to the NW.

The S range is aligned E-W and has been built on a slope so that the E end is at least a metre higher than the W end. It has been extended and altered several times, but presently comprises eight distinct units, including a dwelling house (latterly, two cottages), byre, stable and cart shed, and is currently used for storage. Corrugated iron panels form a flat roof over the central portion of the range, with the remnants of a double pitched pantile roof at each end patched with corrugated iron. The E end is roofless and derelict and the rest of the structure is in poor repair particularly at the W end where the pitched roof has separated from both gable ends and is supported only by its central ridge beam. The W outbuilding was built as a threshing barn with opposed entrances (one of which is blocked), but subsequently modernised by the addition of a horse engine platform on its W side. Both gables and the W wall stand to wall head height, but the E wall is reduced to knee height. The E outbuilding is reduced to low footings and its function is not known.

A creation date of 1773/4 for the farmstead is known because a tenancy agreement of that date records that Sir Charles Scott agreed to build a suitable house for the Sheills family as part of a new farming venture. The earliest structure visible today is the western end of the S range, which was probably the original farmhouse and byre. The W outbuilding also dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and although the E outbuilding cannot be dated it is likely to be broadly contemporary with the others. The original farmsteading probably formed an L-shape with the longer arm being the house and the short stub the barn.

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<sup>1</sup> Scotland's Rural Past ([www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk](http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk))

Some original stonework survives in the gable end corners and rear wall of the house. These gable ends indicate that the wallhead of the original structure was wide enough to form a base suitable for a turf roof. The roof height was later raised, presumably to accommodate re-roofing in pantiles although this heavier roof pushed out the walls of the house and external buttresses now provide wall support. Buttresses outside the W outhouse or barn suggest this building had a similar problem and may also have had a pantile roof. More recently the majority of the tiles have been replaced by the flat roof seen today.

Threipmuir prospered throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The south range was extended eastwards on 3 separate occasions and the frontage remodelled in a new style probably in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The final extension, built over the ruined foundations of the E outbuilding, was complete by 1852 and is visible in a postcard photograph stamped 1914.

The Sheills family farmed Threipmuir until at least 1841. The house was in a poor state of repair in 1851 but it remained a working farm until at least 1861. At this date it had 3 rooms with windows but by 1871 it was only a 2 roomed shepherd's cottage. In 1893 it was unroofed and derelict but by 1901 was reoccupied again by a shepherd. Plans are currently in progress for a restoration project for use as a community workshop.

The buildings and their chronology are described in detail in the documents, *Threipmuir Detailed Site Description* and *Threipmuir History*, and these should be read in conjunction with the measured survey of the farmstead.

### **Western outbuilding (barn)**

The W outbuilding measures 12m N/S by 6m W/E overall across walls 0.60m wide, with a small terrace 2m N/S by 5m W/E attached to the south wall and a raised semi-circular horse engine platform on its W side, measuring approx 7m N/S by 3m W/E. There is a blocked gap, presumably a doorway, at the S end of its W wall which matches an entrance at the S end of the E wall so this building was initially built with opposing doors and was probably a standard barn used for hand threshing. It was therefore constructed at the same time or within a few years of the farmhouse and certainly before the 1780s when the use of mechanical threshing machines became ubiquitous on farms throughout Midlothian. The W wall has two slit windows matched by at least one in the E wall however the remainder of the E wall is too destroyed to identify any others. All the W openings have been blocked up but airflow would have been obstructed by the semi-circular terraced

foundations of a horse mill, raised about half a metre above ground level and separated from the west wall of the outhouse by a gap about 2m wide. The N and S ends of the semicircle are truncated stone-built pillars with the remains of a third pillar set at the apex of the curve. There is no other evidence of walling so the mill was presumably open sided except for the three pillars which supported a roof structure of some kind. In the 1853 1st Edition OS map the barn is shown roofed while the mill is unroofed. The central post is clearly shown so it could still have been functional but it is more likely the horse mill had fallen out of use by this date. There is no evidence that a shaft ran through the lower half of the wall so a wheel turned by a single horse probably turned an overhead shaft that ran into the barn under the eaves to drive a threshing machine inside. The wall fabric of the N end of the barn is different from the S end, suggesting that the barn was extended northwards, or partially re-built at some stage – perhaps to accommodate construction of the mill and its accompanying machinery.

A postcard photograph stamped 1914 shows the barn derelict with its side walls reduced to about 1m high but with both gable ends standing to their full height. Its appearance is very similar today but the inside has been internally subdivided into wooden stalls perhaps for lambing pens. Part of the E wall has collapsed down to its foundations and there are two external buttresses in the middle of this wall. The small terraced area attached to the outside of the S gable is shown roofed with a small yard in the 1st Edition 1852 OS map and could have been a lean-to poultry house.

### **Easter outbuilding**

The E outbuilding measures 10m N/S by 5m W/E overall across walls 0.60m thick and is little more than a raised terrace with a truncated N gable still upstanding and a gap on the W side which could represent a central doorway. It is shown as ruinous on all the OS maps and it pre-dates an E extension (Unit H) to the S range which has been built on top of it. Its construction date cannot be determined but presumably dates to a period of prosperity for the farm and is therefore probably late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century in date and when originally constructed must have been well separated from the main range. A concrete floored platform measuring approx 5m N/S by 3m W/E extends E from the N end of the E wall of this outbuilding. The S portion of this platform is not clearly defined but its concrete floor suggests some connection with a dairy and it might have been a place to stand milk churns for collection.

### **South range: summary**

The S range measures 36m W/E and 6m N/S overall with a drystone wall on its S side enclosing a garden 36m x 20m. This wall still stands about 2m high at its SW corner but only about 1m high on the SE and E sides while the N end of the W garden wall has been reduced to its foundations. Several coping stones have been used to augment the terrace at the S end of the W outbuilding. The garden wall overlies the remains of a larger enclosure (visible on a 1969 RCAHMS aerial photograph OS\_69\_235\_400) measuring approx 105m x 30m which may have formed the garden plot of the original farmhouse. This enclosure in turn overlies the N end of a patch of rig and furrow which runs under the modern wall down into the reservoir and therefore pre-dates its formation. The rig is 6m in width and aligned N/S and a similar patch aligned NW/SE lies NW of the farmhouse. The aerial photograph also shows that a rectangular enclosure measuring approx 30m W/E by 40m N/S lay to the W of both house and barn. The N side of this enclosure continues the westward line of the N gable of the barn while the S side continues the line of the garden wall so this may have been a stack yard for the farm.

The S range displays an enormous variety of building styles which has proved very complex to disentangle since it has been considerably rebuilt and renovated throughout its 240 year history. It is divided into four segments on the 1853 OS 1st Edition map but the surveyors were probably counting chimneys. Today it can be structurally divided into eight separate units (see plan) but internal doorways link many of them. Unit A is a separate unit, B and C are linked, D and E are linked, F is a separate unit with a cobble floor and drain and G and H were a linked unit. It is unlikely that sections A and F-H were intended as dwellings so the range B-E probably incorporated the dwelling house and this section is shown with whitewashed walls in the 1914 postcard photograph. The roof in the 1914 photograph was constructed sometime in the 1890s and the sections still visible today are probably the remnants of that.

The front (N) and rear (S) walls are completely different. The front currently has 4 windows of varying size and 5 doors still in use while the rear wall has no doorways but has 2 large windows, an inserted glass block and several blocked aperture slits. The front wall east of the doorway to Unit A has been completely remodelled. At some stage the central portion of the W gable was dismantled leaving only the NW and SW corner stubs before being rebuilt. However a blocked aperture in the rear wall of the Unit A indicates an early date and this stretch of wall, which extends at least as far as the window in Unit D along with the gable corners, which are identical in style, probably formed the rear wall of the original 1773/4 farmhouse.

The front view of Units C and D bear a striking resemblance to George Smith's single apartment double cottage ("Essay on the construction of cottages suited for the dwellings of the labouring classes" G. Smith 1834, Design I). He was an influential Edinburgh architect and perhaps some of his ideas were adopted by local landowners during Improvement works. The wide gateway access into Unit G suggests this was a cart or carriage shed.

### **South range: back (South) wall**

The S wall of the house is the most significant in terms of helping to determine phases. Units A to D are structurally earlier than the rest of the range and the fabric of the rear wall is fairly homogenous in style with large roughly squared or rectangular rubble sandstone blocks laid in crude courses. Reconstruction work is evident since the slit window in the rear of Unit A is neatly blocked and stonework around the insertion of the opaque glass block in Unit B and the junction of Units B and C is small and randomly coursed. The only window in Unit B is small and N facing but the main centrally placed southward facing window in the rear of Unit C may be original. This wooden sash and case frame measures 0.55m by 0.75m and is surrounded by broached sandstones with wide margins. Unit D had only a small aperture in the rear wall, which is now blocked, while both back and front windows are either later insertions or have been considerably modified. The rear S facing large wooden framed sash and case window at the east end of the rear wall of Unit D has fine broached wide sandstone margins, however the stonework around this window is poorly structured.

The external SW corner of Unit A has dressed squared grey sandstone quoins and there is no sign of any joints in the rear wall until the SE corner of Unit D where a vertical line of massive plain squared grey sandstone quoins clearly forms a gable end. Although there are no corresponding quoins at the front of the house it is notable that the dividing wall between Units D and E appears to be extremely wide, certainly sufficient to have formed the end wall of a house. There is therefore a strong case for suggesting that Units A to D are probably the original 1773/4 farmhouse.

The Unit E extension has large regular shaped blocks of red and yellow sandstone laid in courses. Units E and F are contemporary because the lower courses of stonework continue uninterrupted along the rear of Unit F, below the blocked aperture but the upper courses have been demolished and rebuilt on several occasions, most recently to accommodate the flat roof and rear skylight of Unit E. The pantiles of Unit F overhang the walls by a considerable amount and a layer of mortar has been laid across the wall tops to seal the gap between pantiles and wallhead. A vertical line of

massive plain squared pink and grey sandstone quoins form the lower courses of the SE corner of Unit F. The rear wall of Units G and H is butted up against Unit F. It is constructed with smaller more rectangular shaped stones and appears to be a single phase build.

If Units A to D comprised the original farmhouse A could have been a byre with B and C the dwelling house. D could have been used as a separate storage or animal house, perhaps for pigs, but was later modified and linked internally to the additional narrow Unit E. Units E and F were later additions followed by Units G and H.

Threipmuir is unusual in that its courtyard faces N but there is nothing in the rear wall to indicate a S facing entrance and the layout of the steading probably evolved in relation to the original L-shaped design.

### **South range: front (North) wall**

UNIT A has a front (N) wall comprising a mix of very weathered white and red sandstone of various sizes poorly coursed. Two rubble-built buttresses support the wall which is being pushed outwards by the weight of the pantile roof which is in a state of near collapse. The buttresses are not visible in the 1914 photograph so must have been constructed after that date. There is a door at the east end of this unit but it was considered too dangerous to enter. However it was possible to look inside and view the interior which appears to be divided into three stalls and is probably a stable.

There is a centrally placed aperture in the W gable end and one blocked in the S (rear) wall measuring about 0.15cms wide externally. It was not possible to determine if this unit had a fireplace although shaped stonework could be seen protruding into the room from the east wall. The wall between this unit and neighbouring Unit B rises to full gable height with a small chimney stack and there is no internal connection between them.

Units B to E are all covered by a flat roof and their N (front) wall appears to be a single period construction commencing with the broached quoins at the NW corner of Unit B as far as the E gable end of Unit E. The actual stonework varies along the length of this front wall but there has been considerable reworking of windows and doors and the variations can be accounted for by these renovations. It was not possible to enter this range but enough could be seen through windows to identify most of the internal house divisions and fireplaces. However no measurements were possible so the following analysis remains speculative.

UNIT B has no direct access to the outside and its windows were covered over but an internal doorway was visible from Unit C. The front (N) wall of Unit B has a small fixed 4-pane wooden frame window measuring 0.50m x 0.75m and in the rear wall a massive slab of opaque blue green glass has been roughly inserted held in place by cement. Ventilation grills have been inserted into the lower courses of both front and back walls suggesting the most recent use for this unit was as a bathroom. The 1914 photograph shows a chimney at this point so presumably the wall dividing Units B and C rose to full gable height. An area of disturbed or rebuilt stonework in the rear wall at this point could be the result of post-1914 removal of a chimney. It was not possible to see if there was a fireplace inside this Unit.

UNIT C had a 4-pane wooden frame window in the front (N) wall when first visited measuring about 0.50m x 0.85m. This may have been a replacement window because the recessed stone windowsill shows signs of damage but is comparable with the window shown in the 1914 photograph. A 6-pane sash and case window is set into the S (rear) wall. The west internal wall has a fireplace about half way along its length vented on the flat roof by a short stack with a very long chimney pot replacing the original chimney shown in the 1914 photograph. This unit is entered from the outside by a door in the N (front) wall which opens along the E wall that divides it from Unit D into a small wooden internal porch. The stones forming the upper half of the door frame are large square broached grey sandstone. They are still sharp edged and may, until quite recently, have been protected from weathering by an external porch. There is no clear evidence of this in the N wall today but the stones above the doorway are un-pointed, the gutter is missing, and the aerial photograph shows a small roofed extension at this point. The un-broached lower half of the doorway may reflect an earlier phase of construction. Stones forming the E side of the door frame butt up against stones forming the W door frame of Unit D.

UNIT D is entered from the outside by a door opening along the W wall that divides it from Unit C. The broached stones framing the lower portion of this doorway show considerable rubbing on the W side creating a slightly dished door edge. It seems too low on the door to be the result of cattle or sheep but could possibly have been caused by pigs. The rest of door frame edges are generally more smoothed and worn than those of the door to Unit C which suggests either an earlier construction date or considerably more use although it could also simply reflect the fact that they were unprotected by an external porch. The large sash and case window measuring 0.65m x 1.00m in the front (north) wall is a comparatively recent enlargement because it has no windowsill or framing stones around it and the 1914 photograph shows only a very small square aperture set high up in the wall. The rear wall of Unit D has a small blocked aperture at the west end and a large

sash and case window at the east end measuring about 1.00m x 0.75m framed by large broached grey sandstones. It was not possible to look inside but an internal doorway is visible from Unit E.

UNIT E is a narrow space internally linked to Unit D but with no direct access to the outside. There is a large sash and case window in the front (north) wall with stone recessed window sill. This window was broken and it was possible to look inside. There is no window in the rear S wall but a glassed roof section has been set at ceiling height running the full width of the room to give additional light. The end of a broad wooden beam protrudes into this room from the E wall just below the ceiling which is matched by a similar beam end protruding from the W wall. The latter beam appears to be set at a lower level than the other but this could not be verified without access. Very narrow, metal ventilator grills similar to those in Unit B have been inserted into the lowest levels of both front and rear walls with a wide soil or waste pipe below the rear wall ventilator. The wall dividing it from Unit D appears to be very broad with an internal door at the north end giving access between the two sections and a fireplace situated about half way along the dividing wall with Unit F. There is no window in the rear wall but the fireplace shows that although small the room needed to be kept warm and the vents suggest its use as some kind of utility room, or perhaps a cheese room (“Agricultural Buildings” John Shaw, 423 in *Scotland’s Buildings* 2003 eds Geoffrey Stell, John Shaw, Susan Storrier v3 Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Tuckwell Press, East Linton). The E wall forms the gable end of the pitched roof covering Unit F and has a chimney stack.

The E half of the roof covering UNIT F is pantiled while the W half is patched with corrugated iron sheets. This unit has a finely cobbled floor with a N/S drain extending the full width of the room and could have been used as a byre although its position up-slope above the house would make this unusual and an alternative use is suggested below. In the rear (S) wall a blocked aperture about 50cms square internally and about 15cms wide externally is positioned adjacent to the W wall and opposite the door. A small internal aumbry or recess is set into the thickness of the rear wall about 2m above floor surface about 0.5m E of the blocked aperture. The internal W wall separating this unit from Unit E shows no evidence of any fireplace and the wall appears to be a single period construction comprising a mixture of dark whinstone and a mixture of small and large, grey / white and red sandstones which has been whitewashed or rendered on the inside. High up in the wall a large rounded pale pink sandstone block with a substantial protruding iron cleat or hook is firmly set in place and appears contemporary with the construction of the wall. Its size and rigidity suggests it was a tether intended to support a considerable weight and a restraint or halter was probably attached to it. This suggests the unit could in fact have been used as a “killing shed” for



the occasional slaughter of animals as a necessary part of the farming routine ("Agricultural Buildings" John Shaw, 482 in *Scotland's Buildings 2003* eds Geoffrey Stell, John Shaw, Susan Storrier v3 *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*. Tuckwell Press, East Linton). If so, any stock must have been housed elsewhere, perhaps in the E outhouse if this was standing at the time.

Unit F is accessed from the outside by a door on the N side that opens alongside the W wall but there are no dressed door surrounds so its purpose may have been purely utilitarian. The frontage differs from that of Units B-E comprising squared pale or dark pink sandstones laid in courses with some white stones around the lower part of the doorway and considerable cement re-pointing. Large distinctive plain un-broached dark sandstone quoins in the external NE corner show this was clearly built as a gable end. The internal face of this gable demonstrates at least three phases of build with the lowest levels a mixture of rounded and square stones. Above that are several courses of large dark grey rectangular shaped whinstone rising to three meters above ground level while fine squared, well dressed and neatly coursed stones form the apex of the gable. It is notable that the neatest stonework is clearly the latest. A chimney is visible in the 1914 photograph but there is no sign of any fireplace on this side of the wall.

UNITS G and H were constructed prior to 1852 and are shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> ed OS map. They are both roofed in the 1914 photograph but the walls are unfortunately obscured by the ruins of the E outhouse. Both units are unroofed and ruinous today although the gables still stand to full height. The walls are butted up against Unit F and the N frontage is markedly distinctive with dark purple well dressed sandstone laid in neat courses. This front wall was aligned with, and built partially on top of, the S wall of the E outbuilding, causing it to protrude about 0.5m beyond the rest of the S range.

The interior of Unit G measures 5m W/E by 4m N/S and there is no window in the S wall but the interior face has a small recess or aumbry set into the thickness of the wall about 2m above floor surface. There are two entrances on the front (N) wall separated by a freestanding pillar of coursed stone. The W entrance is just a narrow door but the other is a much wider gateway, probably large enough to accommodate a cart or carriage. The interior W gable wall shows an area of extensive reconstruction measuring about 1m wide and about 2.5m high with an in-filled channel about 2m in length angled up towards the roof line. Either a wide arched doorway has been blocked or a fireplace with an angled chimney flue has been taken out. There is no evidence of a doorway on the other side of this wall in Unit F but the 1914 photograph does show a chimney stack at this point so the existence of a fireplace seems very likely. A fireplace in a carriage shed might seem

unnecessary but perhaps there was a small blacksmithing stove here for small scale implement repair work.

Unit H was separated from Unit G by an internal wall running N/S across width of the building with a gap, probably an internal doorway, at its N end. Only the foundations of the internal wall line remain today and it probably collapsed in its entirety to the E, filling the inside of Unit H with rubble. This has been augmented by its recent use as a dump so the ground level inside Unit H is considerably raised. Unit H could have been used as accommodation although access was only possible internally through Unit G. A large gap in the S (rear) wall is wide enough to have formed a doorway but it probably simply represents the collapse of a large window.

The E gable end wall of Unit H has a small square window at its N end. The gable still stands to its full height although all the coping stones have been lost. A line of stonework beneath these shows that the roof level has been raised at some point; this probably dates from the replacement of a turf or thatch roof with pantiles. A similar feature can be seen in its W gable end and in the gable of Unit A, suggesting that the whole range was, at some stage, turf or thatch roofed. OS Namebook entries (1853) record turf roofed dwellings still in use on the Malleny estate so it is likely that Threipmuir was originally built with one, especially as the landowner who subleased this farm was experiencing financial difficulties at the time the house was built.

### **Acknowledgements and thanks**

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