

St Columba's Roman Catholic Chapel and Presbytery, Miùghlaigh

Report 2: Survey.



G Geddes, on behalf of Alba Archaeology (Highland) Ltd

September 2013

RCAHMS Canmore Id 21373

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles) Sites and Monuments Record **Id 1417**

NGR NL 56413 83432

Executive summary

This report describes the results of a field trip to Mingulay from 22nd to 26th July 2013. The principal aim of the trip was to record the remains of the 19th chapel and presbytery, the subject to a conservation statement by the author (Geddes 2012). Additional time was available to survey John Mackinnon's house and the mill he constructed, as well as part of the township.

Acknowledgements

Daniel Rhodes, Jonathan Grant, Alison McCaig, Mari McKee.

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Objectives

The project was to prepare a survey report and interpretive measured drawings of the building and its site (up to and including the enclosure wall) as currently existing, with drawings as built extrapolated from these where possible using photographs and Baird's drawings. They were to include a site plan (at 1:500), a ground floor plan of the building (at 1:100) and four elevations (at 1:100).

Methodology

The chapel house was surveyed at a scale of 1:100 using a plane-table, tapes and a staff, T-squares and set-squares. John Mackinnon's houses was surveyed at 1:100 using the same traditional method. Daniel Rhodes (NTS) acted as draughtsman and the author as surveyor. The area around John Mackinnon's house was surveyed at a scale of 1:250 using a self-reducing alidade and plane-table. This was undertaken rapidly and, if an measured survey of the township was undertaken, it would need to be carefully peer-reviewed. The mill was surveyed at 1:100 using a plane table and alidade with Jonathan

Grant and Daniel Rhodes (both NTS). Numerous photographs of the buildings were taken using a Canon G8 and an Apple iPhone 5 – these will be catalogued and held within the RCAHMS digital archive, copyright NTS. The original drawings will be catalogued and held in the RCAHMS archive, as will the digital files used to create the illustrations. The drawings are presented at the back of this pdf report, at their drawn scale.

Description

There are only a small number of additional observations to make with respect to the chapel house (General shots – Fig 1-3).

The building is constructed with roughly squared stone that is almost certainly from the island. ‘Jumper-holes’ drilled into the stone in order to allow it to be split with dynamite are visible in a number of places in the building (as well in the school house and enclosure wall) (Fig 4).

The gneiss and granite for the chapel house was probably quarried from the exposed cliffs just to the north and north-east, although an extensive search for direct evidence for quarrying (split boulders, jumper holes, wedge slots, piles of quarry waste) was not successful. Having said that, the whole area of ground immediately north-east of the township is covered in large boulders, exposed bedrock and, to the north, exposed bedrock faces, and some of the latter do seem to have been opened by working (Fig 5). Generally speaking, the margins of the building are of concrete finished with a smooth cement and scribed to appear like inband-outband stonework (Fig 8). This was presumably much cheaper than dressed stone, and perhaps the most sensible option were fine-grained stone for dressings was not readily available. The lowest courses of the quoins are roughly squared stone, but everything from about 1m up is in concrete. In general, the stonework has been built in lime-mortared courses of about 0.35m height, but the courses are up to 0.5m in the south-west gable. The majority of the cills and lintels are cast concrete, although the lintel above the doorway to the chapel is natural stone.

The great majority of the timber work has been removed and burnt, although some has been burnt *in situ* as the dooks set into the NE corner are clearly burnt, and the floor is strewn with reddened slate. A few large safe-lintels survive above the window openings and these are clearly imported sawmilled softwood – there is no evidence for the use of driftwood. The joists of the suspended timber floor as visible in places, as are a few sections of the floorboards (Fig 7). The surviving window frame is one of those put in during the 1970s and is of little interest. The original sash and case windows do not survive, but there are a few sash weights near the window openings (Fig 8).

The concrete cross finial that topped the central dormer has fallen intact to lie in the ruins immediately SW of the main door opening. It was exposed for the purposes of drawing but left in situ. It is important that it is not damaged in any works to the building (Fig 11).

There are three fireplaces in the building, the plain cast-iron surround of one surviving at the western end. The kitchen had a stove, and the concrete plinth and flu show where it stood.

The flues were lined with fireclay pipe and the ornate fireclay chimney cans are stamped by 'Allan Kirkwood, Nitshill, Glasgow', probably referring to the Arden Lime Works and Darnley Fire-clay works (NS55NW 89) (Fig 7 and 12). There is a Belfast sink in the kitchen (Fig 13). It has been split in half during the collapse of the building and is not worth salvaging. The sink bears the mark 'J & M Craig, Pearston, Kilmarnock'. The Craigs had fireclay works at Dean and Hillhead in Kilmarnock, as well as at Perceton. There are a few images of the ruinous works in the RCAHMS collection ([NS33NE 63](#)).

The altar from Mingulay was taken to Castlebay in the 1970s and installed in a side aisle in St Mary's Star of the Sea (Fig 14).

Recommendations

There are no further recommendations with respect to the chapel house, but the original suggestion, that the cross should be retained and used for the focus of a small cairn is still proposed. The worked stones at the rear of the building should also be recorded properly, as it is perfectly possible that some of them have a religious rather than agricultural origin. This could be done by preparing drawings at a scale of 1:10 using basic equipment. John Borland at RCAHMS is able to offer advice on the potential ecclesiastical origins, as well as on recording techniques.

The township has been surveyed accurately by RCAHMS at a mapping scale, but the work undertaken around Mackinnon's house (see below) demonstrates that it would certainly repay a more detailed survey at a scale of 1:250 (not a priority during the original RCAHMS mapping survey). The production of a survey of the township at this scale, and perhaps the survey of one or two of the buildings at 1:100 would make a very useful and informative addition to the record, particularly if it were combined with a detailed written report. A research project centred around Mackinnon, or the development of the township on Mingulay would certainly produce a result of publishable quality. An example of a detailed township survey undertaken by RCAHMS can be seen at <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/22191/details/eigg+grulin+uachdrach/>

The mill itself would itself form an interesting research focus – both buildings have been recorded by current RCAHMS staff, and it should be possible to build up a more detailed picture of the story behind the construction of the building on Mingulay.

Appendix 1

John Mackinnon's House

Mackinnon's family came to Mingulay in the 1830s from Tangusdale in Barra. He was noted as a carpenter, making the altar of the church as well as spinning wheels, boats etc. He left Mingulay as one of the Sandray raiders in 1907 taking up lobster fishing, but had left Sandray by 1909 (Buxton 1995). This building was chosen for survey since it is comparable to the school, school-house and chapel house as a building constructed in a modern style with some imported materials. It is built with roughly squared

and coursed local stone, with rough margins. The joisted timber roof, presumably removed when the building was abandoned, has been covered in felt – visible in photographs, and evidenced by the tar drips that can be seen at the chimneys and along the front wall. The window, door and fireplace openings are all original. It does not appear to have been lined out with timber, given that there are no dooks in the walls, but it was certainly subdivided presumably with stud and board partitions, into three rooms and a hallway.

The roof timbers, doors and windows appear to have been removed and it may be that much of the valuable fittings were taken to Sandray or further afield by John Mackinnon. Although a modest house with no great architectural interest, it is markedly different from most others on the island, and clearly reflects Mackinnon's pioneering spirit as well as his success.

Another survey was undertaken at 1:250 to place the house within its immediate surroundings. The township has not been surveyed in detail other than at a mapping scale, and this demonstrated that it would be a worthwhile project. The house stands on top of the remains of another, part of which survives as a series of edge-set boulders at the eastern end. At the other end are the remains of another ruined building that partly underlies the cottage. Behind the house there is a hut, probably contemporary, but it also stands on something earlier. A 1:250 or 1:500 survey of the township undertaken by an experienced team would certainly bring out more detail in terms of the relationships between the surviving structures and earlier phases.

John Mackinnon's Mill

An unusual building seemingly constructed by John Mackinnon as a direct copy of a mill on Berneray. It stands next to one of the main streams of the island, but takes its water from two tributaries that join the main channel at this point. The millstones were moved by American soldiers to a position about 150m away (Jonathan Grant pers. comm.).

They both measure about 74cm in diameter, and about 10cm in thickness. Only one of the four sides is smooth, the other three presenting rough and uneven faces. They are fitted with metal sleeves and checks around the edges suggest that they were encircled within metal hoops.

The mill site in Berneray is recorded as NL58SE 30. A first hand description is reprinted in Buxton (1995, 145), and the most likely builder was a James Oswald from St Monan's, Fife.

<http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/81659/details/berneray/>



Figure 1 The ruinous chapel house from the south east. In part because of the way that the roof structure moved, bringing on the collapse of the structure, the gable has collapsed into the building, while the front wall has collapsed outwards. The remaining gable is still remarkably straight, as is the back wall.



Figure 2 The back wall of the building is still straight, although the small stands of masonry that formed the half-dormers are coming away. Only one of the three drain-pipes is still in position, and much of the cast concrete coping to the gable has fallen off.



Figure 3 The gable can be seen in detail in this photograph. There is a final joist set into the gable to allow the sarking boards to be fixed to it. The sarking and the slate were tucked under the concrete coping, protecting them from the wind.



Figure 4 The stonework of granite and gneiss is 'sneck-harled' ie there is a mortar coating that covers over all the joints and pinnings (snecking) but does not extend over all the stonework. Holes created by drilling during the quarrying process (known as 'jumpers' are visible on a number of the stones. The staircase is finished in concrete, presumably over a concrete base.



Figure 5 A view of the chapel house from the west. It sits at the end of a low ridge, at a much higher level than the remainder of the settlement. The stone was probably quarried from the exposed bedrock slopes beyond it.



Figure 6 The wall is built with two faces of lime mortared stone, between which there is a filling of smaller stones and mortar. This section, where the concrete quoins have fallen away, one can see how the concrete was set against the wall-fill, and then a cement render was applied to the outside. The inside was lined with timber, held to the wall by timber dooks set into the wall.



Figure 7 The floor of the building is strewn with collapse. The chimney cans survive, the whole SW gable having collapsed into the building. Beyond, there are slates, reddened by the recent fire, all over the floor. Fragments of the timber joists that held the floor can be seen, as can the flu of the kitchen stove and the fireplace.



Figure 8 All of the openings are detailed with cast-concrete blocks. The windowsill has a slight fall to encourage water to drain away from the frame. The frame, which had a hopper window in the upper part, is from the 1970s.



Figure 9 Nothing is left of the timber floor joists that were set in a leveling course of slates. The massive timber safe lintels are certainly of imported sawn softwood. The window frame is one of those put in during the 1970s restoration.



Figure 10 One of the sash weights from the original sash and case windows.



Figure 11 The concrete finial fell almost directly downwards from its original position, despite the fact that most of the front wall fell outwards. It was exposed for taking measurements, but left in situ.



Figure 12 Detail of the stamp on a chimney can. 'Allan Kirkwood, Nitshill, Glasgow'.



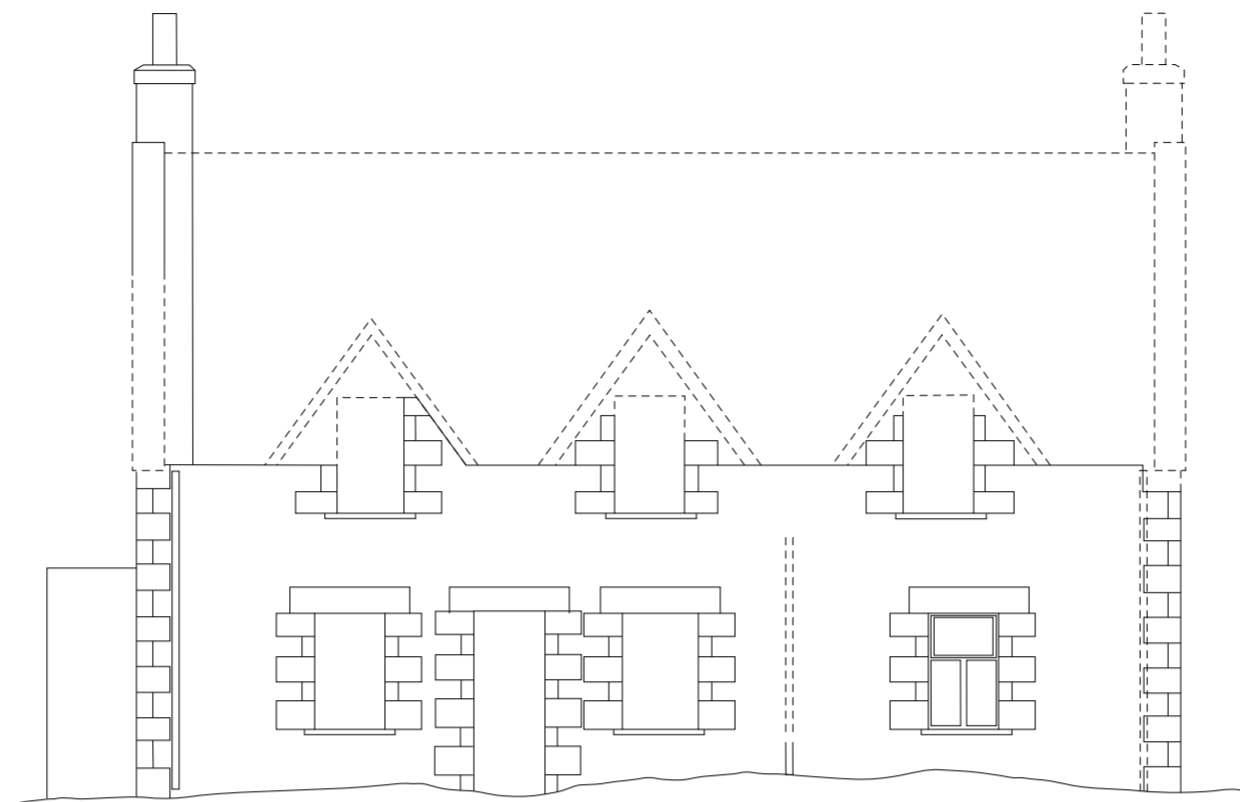
Figure 13 The Belfast kitchen sink, probably fallen at its original position by the window. The makers mark 'J & M Craig, Pearston, Kilmarnock' is cast into the bottom left corner.



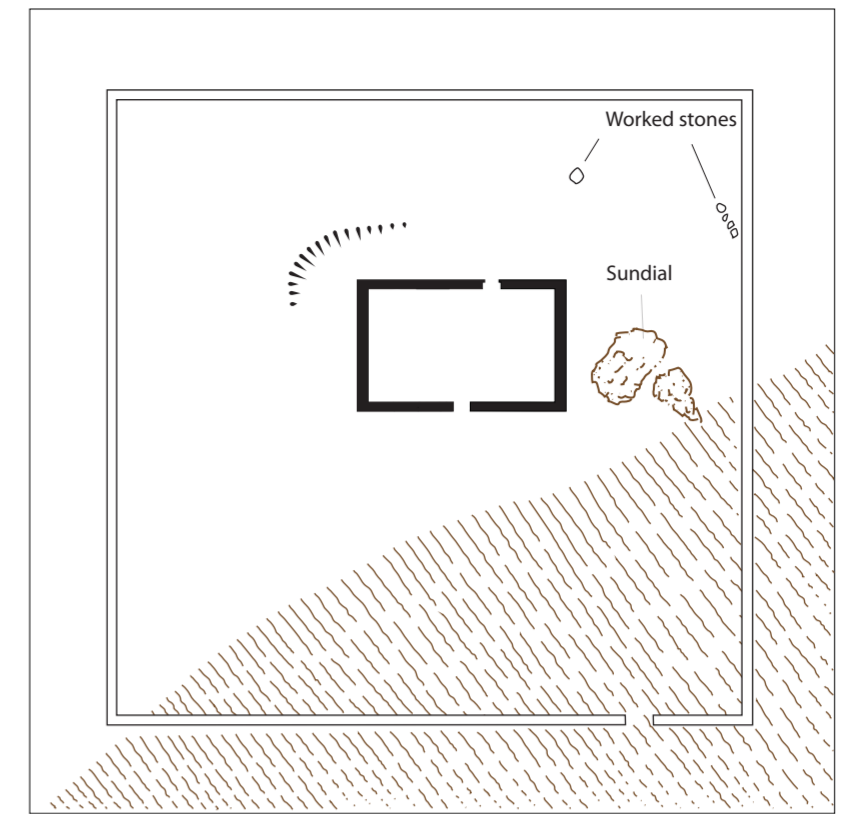
Figure 14 – The altar from Mingulay, now installed in a side aisle at St Mary’s Star of the Sea, Castlebay.



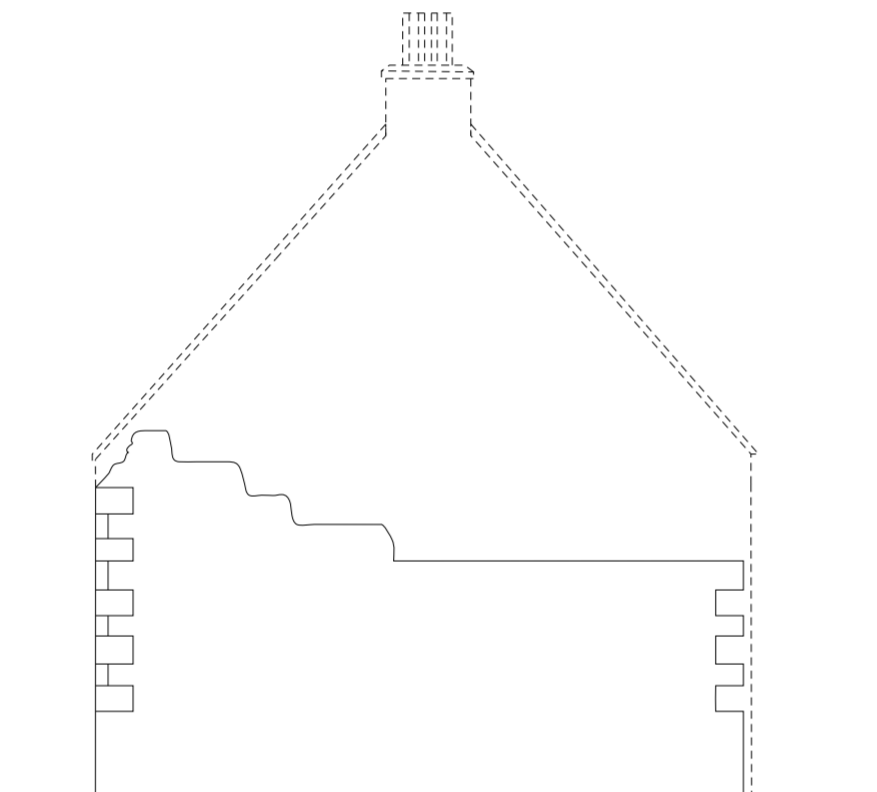
BUXTON 1984. SC1318969.



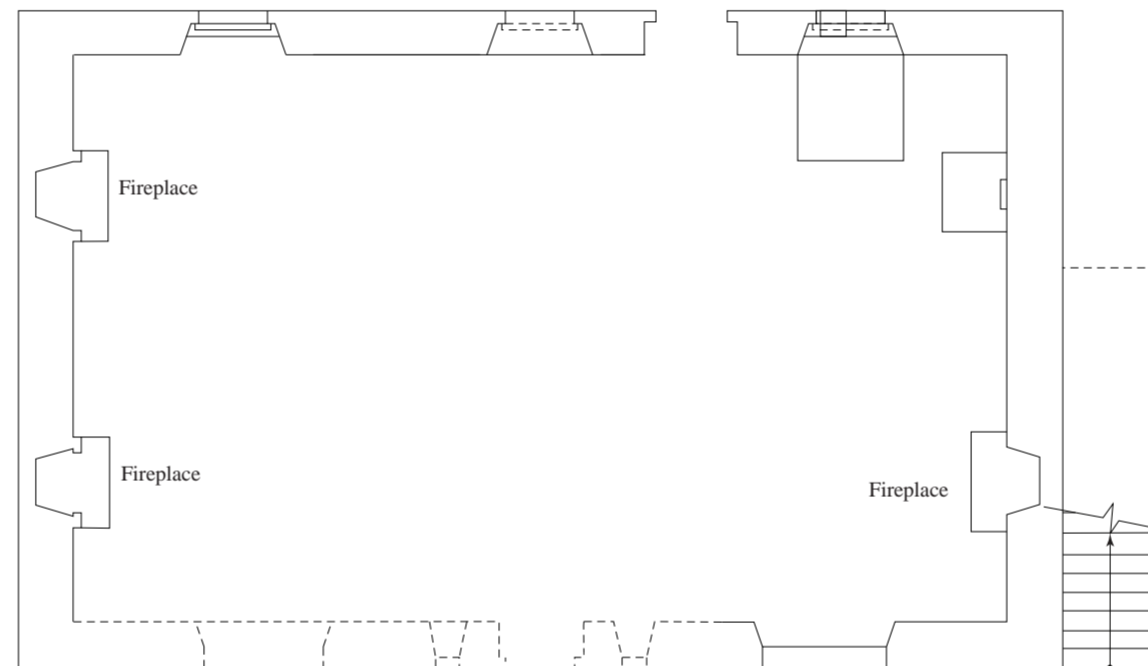
NORTH WEST ELEVATION 1:100



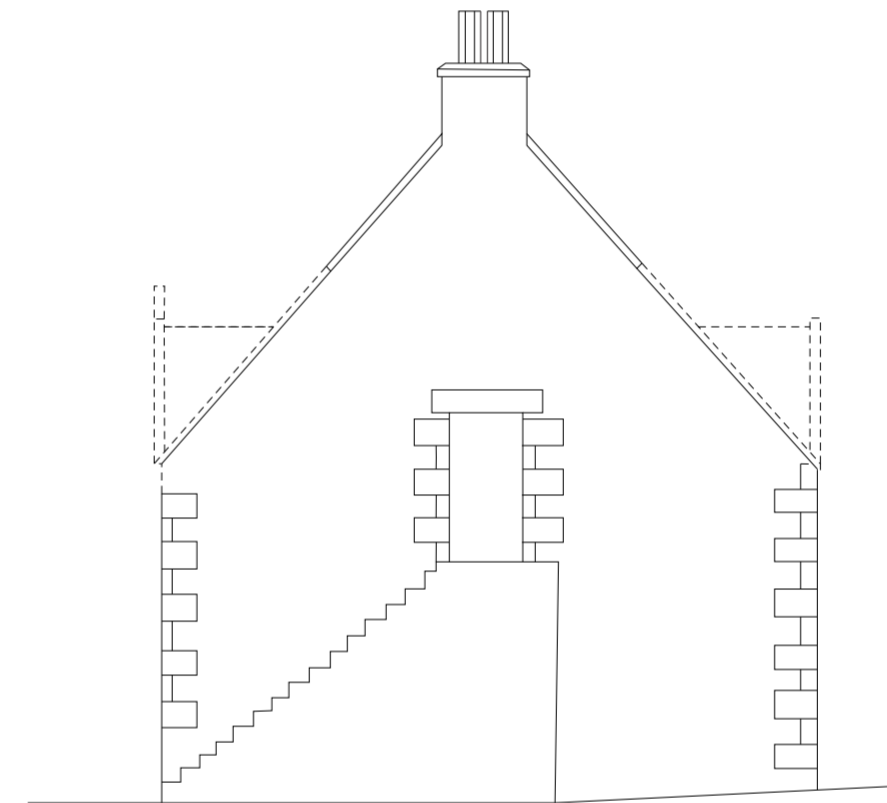
SITE PLAN 1:500



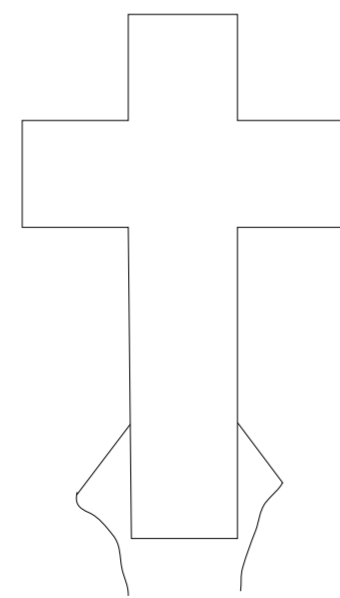
SOUTH WEST ELEVATION 1:100



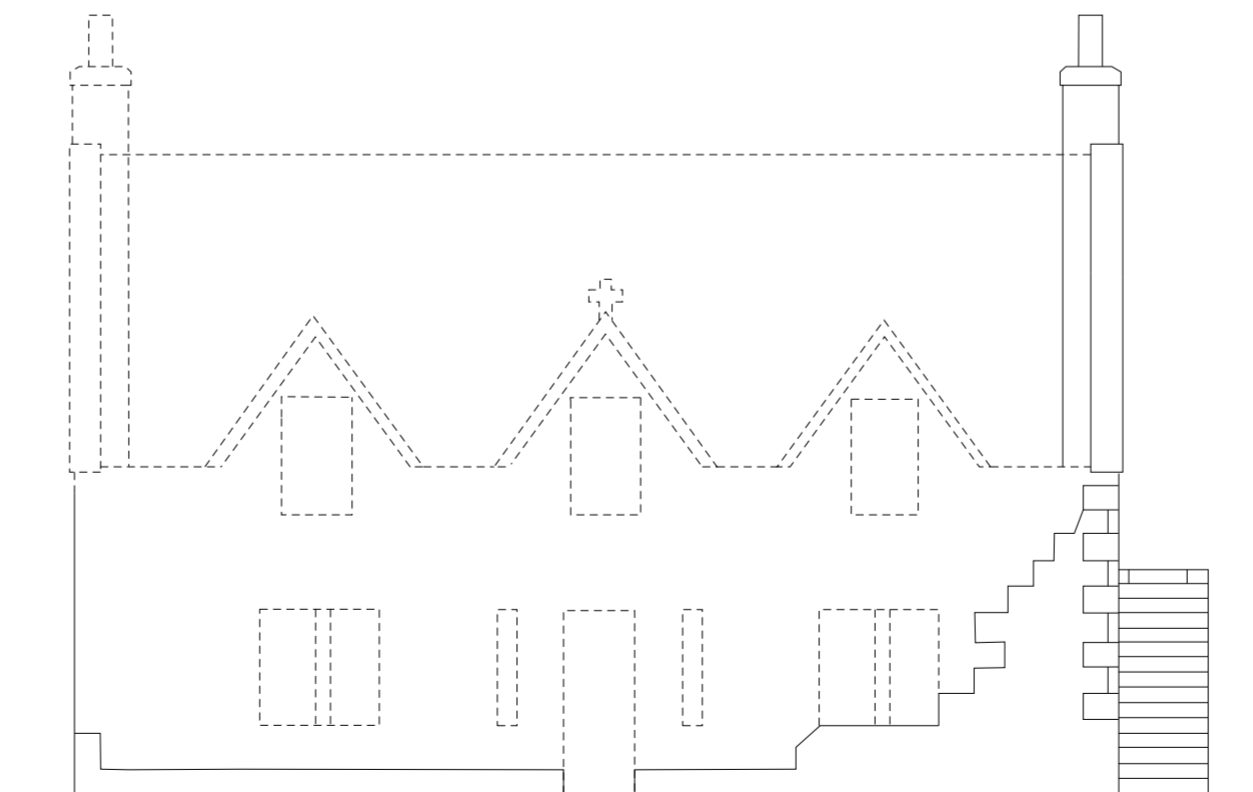
PLAN 1:100



NORTH EAST ELEVATION 1:100



FINIAL DETAIL 1:10



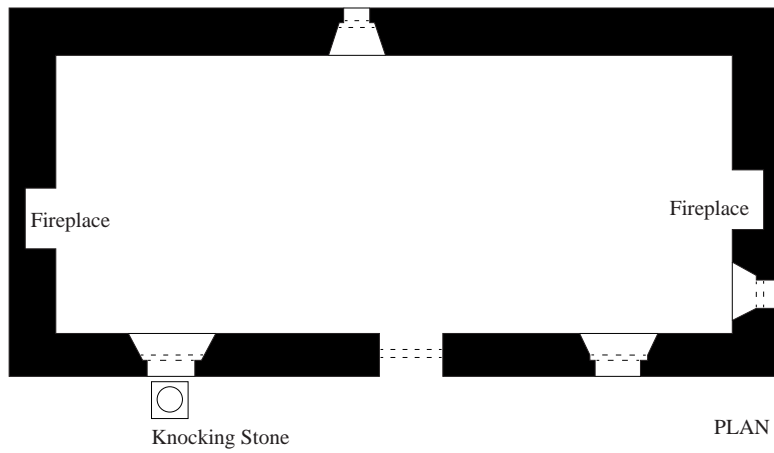
SOUTH EAST ELEVATION 1:100



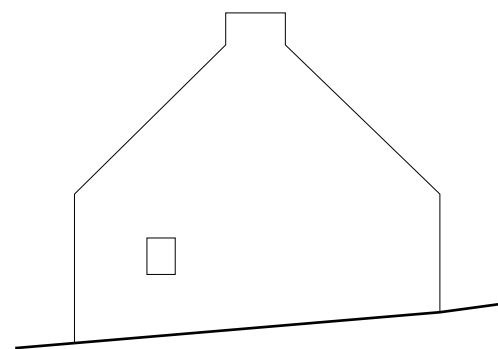
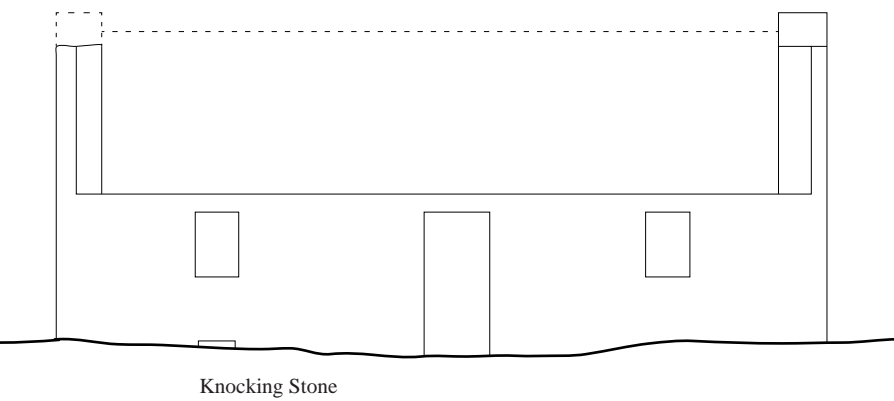
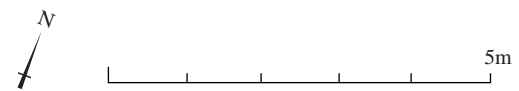
CHAPEL AND PRESBYTERY, MINGULAY
SURVEYED 22-24 JULY 2013

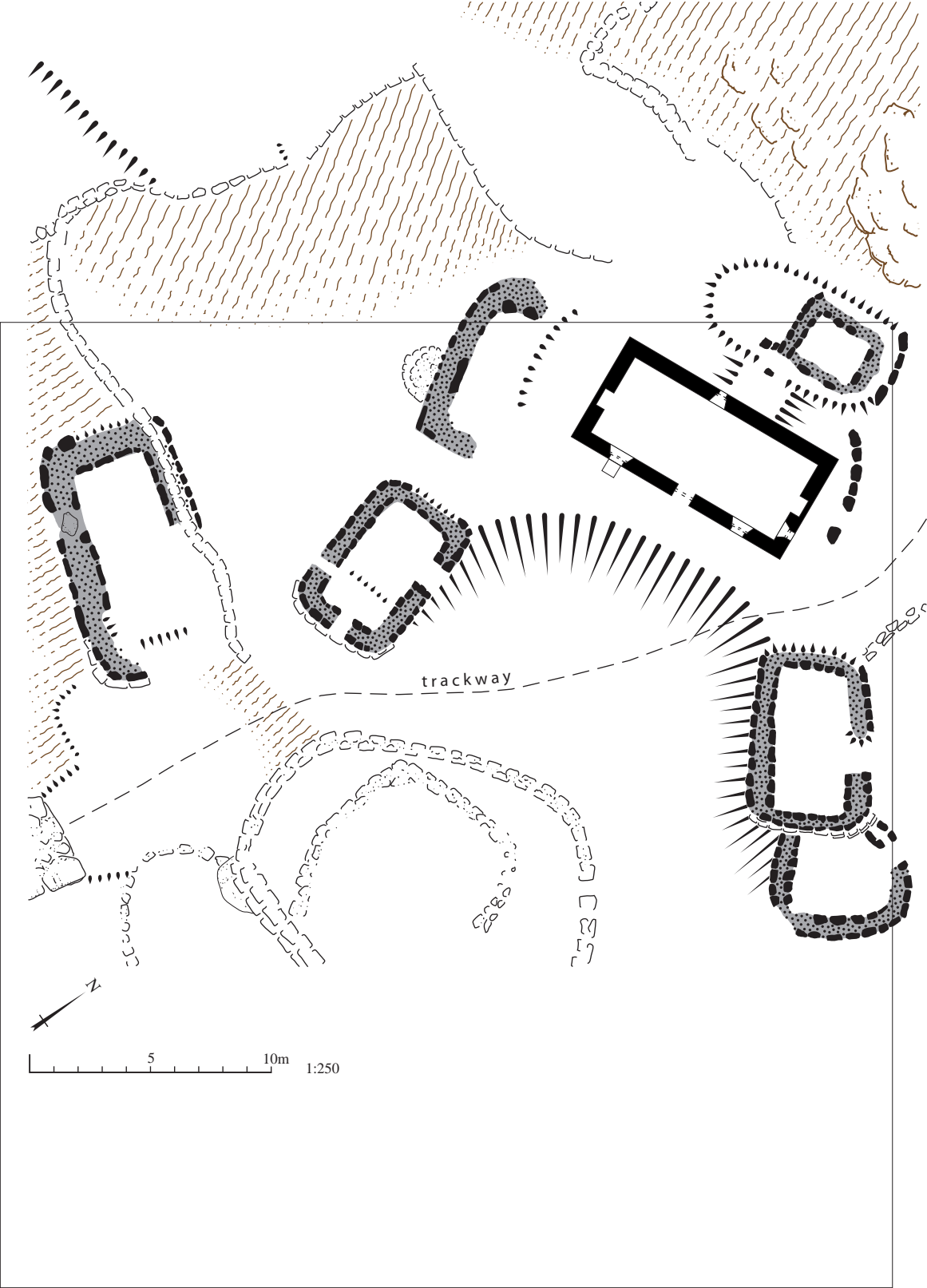


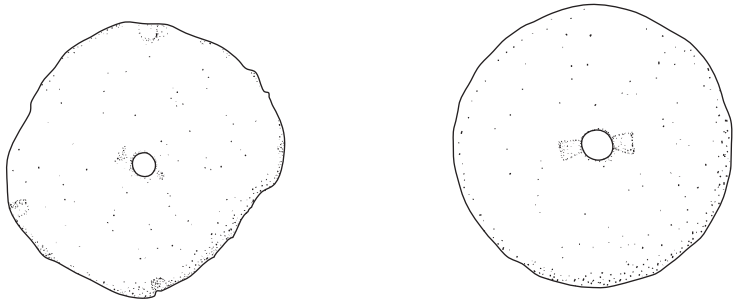
VIEW FROM SOUTH



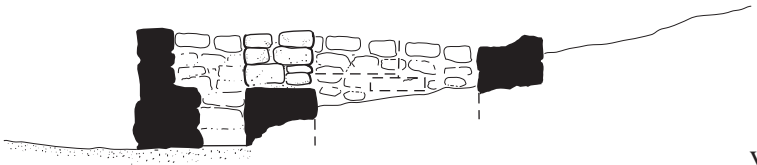
JOHN MACKINNON'S HOUSE, MINGULAY
SURVEYED 24 JULY 2013







Millstones
1:20



x
Section x-y



1 2 3 4 5 6 7m 1:100