

JMB02

Historic Buildings Survey :  
walls to the rear of  
**John Muir'S Birthplace**  
Dunbar, East Lothian



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By Andrew Dutton

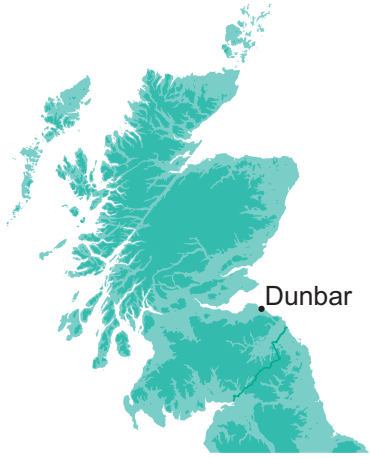
Client :



November 4<sup>th</sup> 2002

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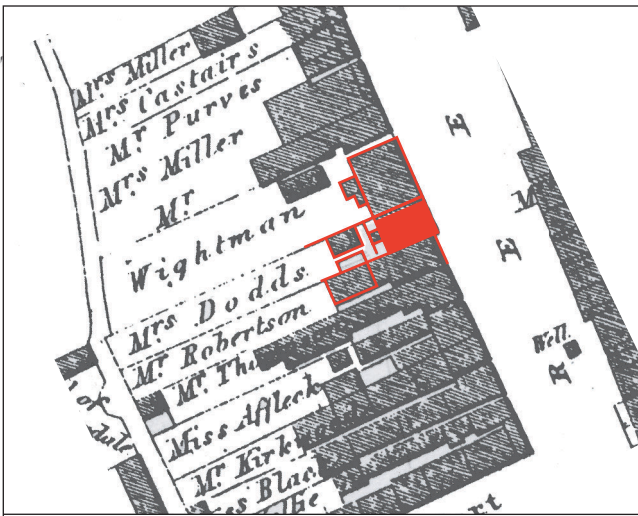
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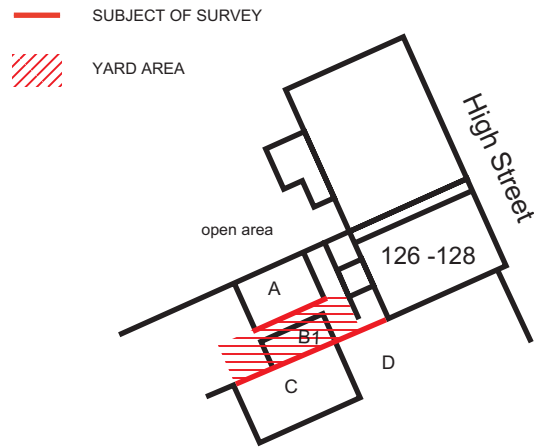
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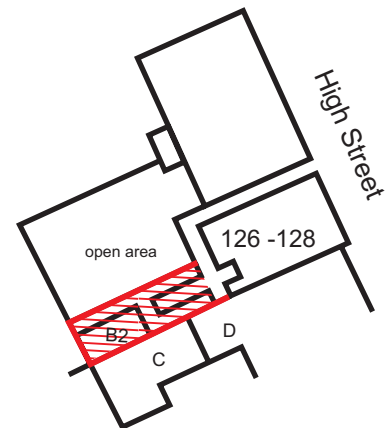
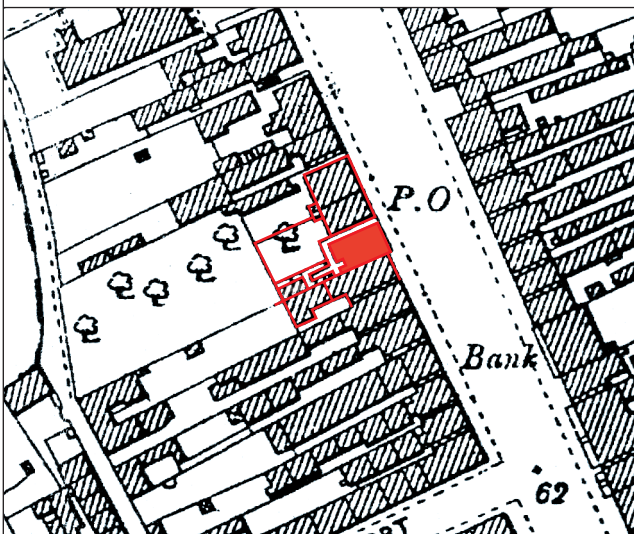


John Wood 1830 (map of Dunbar)



Transcribed from John Wood's map 1830

OS 1st Edition 1857 6" map.



Transcribed from OS 1st Edition 1857



Figure 1. John Muir's Birthplace: Site location and map progression.

## **1. Introduction and Background**

This report records aspects of three wall elevations to the rear of no.126-128 High Street, Dunbar (NT 6786 7900), formerly the birthplace of Victorian era conservationist John Muir. The main house and ‘courtyard’ that is formed by the elements described in this report are to be re-developed as an interpretation centre on the life of John Muir.

The work was undertaken by Headland Archaeology staff on behalf of the John Muir Trust to a brief specified by the Heritage Officer on behalf of East Lothian Council. The project follows in the wake of previous archaeological work in the courtyard precinct that is described separately in *John Muir’s Birthplace : The results of an Archaeological Excavation* by Headland Archaeology and findings from that report will not be unnecessarily re-iterated here. It is outwith the scope of the present brief to interpret specific features, openings etc that survive within the surveyed masonry. However evidence of occupation or activity demonstrated by the excavations and likelihood of particular structural interrelationships may be proposed.

The present main building is located on the west side of Dunbar High Street and is outwardly an 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century townhouse. It lies within the known bounds of the medieval settlement and is a category “B” listed building dating to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The present frontage along the line of the High Street, an 18<sup>th</sup> century manifestation, is apparently set forward of an earlier - possibly medieval frontage - the walls, closes and associated plots of which may be represented by the clay bonded wall footings exposed in the rear yard. The south wall of what is now the bakery yard next door forms the northern boundary of the site.

## **2. Methodology**

The three elevations of the subject building were recorded and subsequently produced through a combination of reflectorless EDM (Leica TCR307) running TPS-CAD software. These were undertaken using AutoCAD Lite and Adobe Illustrator 10 software. The elevation drawings sought to record all openings, evidence of phasing and any elements of dressed stonework.

Elevations were photographed using 35 mm colour print and slide film, supplemented by digital photographs. Sufficient were obtained to allow for the possibility of constructing full-rectified photographic elevations should they be required. The full archive of drawings and photographs will be lodged with the National Monuments Record of Scotland.

## **3. Cartographic and Other Sources**

The available cartographic sources, John Wood’s 1830 map of Dunbar and the Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6” map of 1854, are somewhat ambiguous when it comes

to identifying particular structures and associated boundary walls. However the north and south property boundaries that are evident today, and are the subject of this report, do seem to be represented (Fig 1).

#### 4. Survey

The elevations are presented as a set of three drawings shown in relationship to the existing, surrounding structures. Particular prominent features within each elevation are listed below and numbered on the accompanying drawings.

##### South wall elevation

- 1 *Mortared rubble infilled possible opening – lintel and rubble rybats just visible under area of harling.*
- 2 *Mortared rubble window opening – rubble rybats visible adjacent to top of west wall.*
- 3 *Possible subsumed gable - area of stepped, inclined roughly dressed rubble blocks.*
- 4 *Blocked window within 7.*
- 5 *Interface between 7 and 8.*
- 6 *Scarring from semi-bonded north south aligned brick walling.*
- 7 *Coursed infill west of 8.*
- 8 *Uneven rubble masonry probably butted by 7.*
- 9 *Area of slaister pointing.*
- 10 *Mortared brick infilled opening.*
- 11 *Line of shallowly inclined mortar and tile fragments – possibly part of lean-to roofline.*

##### North wall elevation

- 12 *Threshold slab incorporated into clay bonded wall footing 20, adjacent to blocked doorway 13.*
- 13 *Mortar bonded rubble blocking in doorway.*
- 14 *Scarring from semi-bonded north-south aligned brick walling.*
- 15 *Lintel, pantiles and relief.*
- 16 *Upper courses of masonry above 15.*
- 17 *Interface between phases of coursing.*
- 18 *Mortar & limewash indicating pitch of later lean-to roof.*
- 19 *Quoins at corner of bakery north wall and close.*
- 20 *Clay bonded wall footings butting and parallel to north wall.*
- 21 *3m section of clay bonded wall footings butting and parallel to 20.*

##### West wall elevation

- 22 *Vertical scarring due to removal of vertical extent of east-west wall 20.*
- 23 *Interface between phases of coursing.*

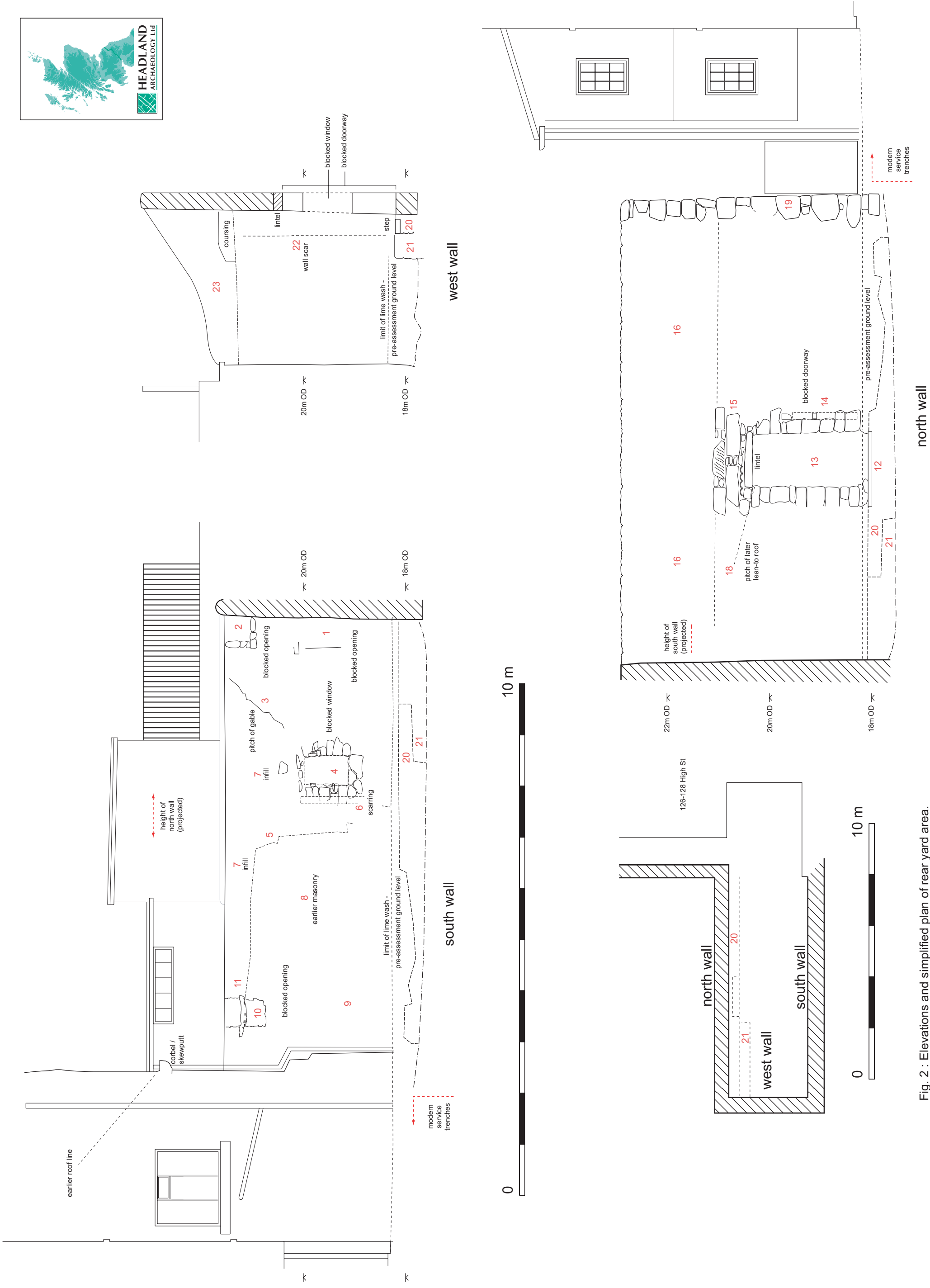


Fig. 2 : Elevations and simplified plan of rear yard area.

## 5. Discussion

Both the north and south wall, which both contain elements of earlier buildings, are assumed originally to have been external elevations. All of the surveyed walls were built of sandstone rubble, mostly random and built to level. Rybats in all cases were of squared rubble. Evidence of splaying that might otherwise indicate an internal or external wall face is lacking due to all the openings being blocked. This is more readily appreciated where the doorway (13) opens into the yard. The presence of the step (12) in the upper course of the clay-bonded wall (20) is curious, as it is not central to the opening. The lintel (15) too is a poor and crude affair, being barely long enough to bridge the opening itself. If it were not for the larger, semi-decorative relief header of large rubble blocks and snecking above it might be considered an insertion. Just below the lintel are the remnants of a line of pantiles set in mortar, perhaps once a simple porch hood, a feature that must date from the end of the eighteenth century. The margins are of roughly dressed rubble. Partly cut into the jambs on the east side of the doorway is a vertical scar (14) containing brick from a later north-south wall on the site.

Above the level of the doorway header (15) the coursing appears to be different (16) and this difference is continued into the shorter west wall. The quoins (19) at the corner of the south-east corner of the bakery building appear to bear this out and are smaller above this line, suggesting that the walls were raised.

The clay-bonded wall (21) terminates immediately west of the blocked doorway (13) and is considered to be deliberate rather than the result of robbing out of the feature further east (Morrison 2002).

Both the north wall and the south wall were seen to cut the earliest cobbled surface seen in the excavation, yet the west wall was constructed from a higher level and overlay the cobbling. This west wall was assumed to be an insertion. There was however, evidence of scarring (22) adjacent to its interface with the north wall where an east-west aligned wall, essentially the vertical extension of the clay-bonded wall below (20) butted, or was at least partially bonded with it. The curving profile along the top of the west wall may be later again, a simple case of reconciling the different height of north and south walls.

The south wall did not show any evidence that the line of upper coursed work (16) seen in the north and west wall continued. Immediately adjacent to the west wall and partly obscured by it was a blocked opening (2), defined on two sides by rubble rybats. Below this more blocking was revealed (1), a possible lintel and rubble rybats just visible under an area of harling. The true extent of these features was not revealed but both are presumed to have been window openings. Both these features occurred within an area of wall comprised of fairly large coursed blocks, defined at the top edge by a diagonal line of roughly dressed, stepped blocks (3). This may indicate the line of a gable since subsumed in later stonework. Above and to the east of the stepped blocks the masonry was comprised of smaller stone rubble, in which a further blocked opening (4) was observed. This was defined by squared rubble rybats and immediately east of this was scarring indicating the former presence of a semi-bonded north-south aligned brick wall (6).

The masonry exposed in the lower, east side of the wall (8), is distinctively different to that seen in the other elevations. It is of more regular sized rounded stone and bulges





Plate 1. (left)  
 General view of yard looking east.  
 The extent of the clay bonded walls (20,21) and the location of the blocked doorway (14) can be seen.



Plate 2. (right)  
 The west wall - The clay bonded walls (20,21) scarring (22) and upper coursing are visible.



Plate 3. (below)  
 The north wall - Detail of the blocked doorway head and lintel (15).  
 Pantiles are visible just above the lintel on the left.



Plate 4. (left)  
 The north wall - The blocked doorway and step (12,13) above the reduced clay bonded walls (20,21) with the raised walls above.



Plate 5. (left)  
 The north wall - Detail of the upper coursing and quoins (19).

Plate 6. (below)  
 The south wall - Line of possible gable (3) and blocked opening (2).



noticeably beyond its interface with the infilling (7). It is probably one side of a building indicated on Wood's 1830 map and later incorporated into the site boundary. The eastern portion of this wall has been plaster pointed, part rendered and keyed.

Another blocked opening, infilled with mortared brick occurs at the interface between earlier masonry (8), in its upper reaches and later infill (7).

It is not clear whether the south wall butts or is bonded with the existing house wall, and the opportunity to access this is precluded by the latter-day rendering of the wall. A number of features were recorded in the adjoining wall face of the adjacent building, most noticeably a corbel or perhaps more likely, an ornamental skewputt. Perhaps coincidentally, this corresponds with the height of the raised wall of the north wall. Irregularities in the lower sections of the wall may indicate buttressing or even an earlier floor level.

## **6. Conclusions**

From the available evidence it would not appear that any of the upstanding walls predates the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and in all likelihood are considerably later. It is likely however, based on their visible eastern extent that they do predate the later mid 18<sup>th</sup> century house that now fronts the high street. The configuration seen on both the 1830 and 1857 maps can be reconciled with elements recorded during the survey. Although originally the north and south walls were solely external elevations later lean-tos incorporated them as internal walls.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from both the observations made during the course of the survey and the results of the earlier excavation. Clearly the north wall incorporates elements from building A (Fig 1) attached to the neighbouring bakery. This building was standing in 1830 but demolished by 1857 except for that wall retained as a property boundary.

A section of an external wall from an earlier building C or D on the adjacent plot (Fig 1) is retained in the length of the south wall and must be pre-1830 in date.

The west wall, which overlies a cobbled surface cut by the foundations for both the north and south walls, was apparently built after 1830 but was in place by 1857. This is curious as scarring in the west wall elevation suggests an interface between it and a vertical extension of wall (20), since demolished.

Vertical scarring and brick inserts seen on both north and south walls seem to relate to the construction of less substantial outbuildings and lean-tos in the yard area. The ground plan of potentially such a structure is indicated on both maps (B1 and B2). Although the juxtaposition of each differs the scarring probably represents one or both of these structures.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

*Fieldwork was carried out on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of October by Andrew Dutton, Sarah-Jane Haston and Kirsty Dingwall respectively, and the project was managed by Tim Holden. Illustrations were prepared by Andrew Dutton. The curator was Biddy Simpson of East Lothian Council.*

## **8. Appendix 1**

### *References*

***Suddaby. I 2002 Lawson Place, 138-140 High Street Dunbar, East Lothian, Archaeological Evaluation, Data Structure Report, No 694 CFA Report***

***Morrison J & Holden T John Muir's Birthplace 126-128 High St. Dunbar : Historic Buildings Survey 2002 Headland Archaeology report (unpublished)***

***Morrison J John Muir's Birthplace : The Results of an Archaeological Excavation 2002 Headland Archaeology report (unpublished)***

### *Maps*

***Wood J. 1830 Plan of Dunbar***

***First Edition Ordnance Survey 1854 6" Haddingtonshire Sheet 6*** |