

## V.

SOME CRUCK-FRAMED BUILDINGS IN THE ABERFELDY  
DISTRICT OF PERTHSHIRE.

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Comparatively little study has been made of cruck-framed buildings in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> although structures which incorporate a cruck framework are known to occur in most parts of the country. The best approach to such matters as distribution and regional variation would seem to be by the completion of a number of local surveys in as many different districts as is possible. Surveys of this sort would be a major contribution towards the solution of more general problems concerning the origin and evolution of house-types in Scotland. This paper is based upon a survey made in the Aberfeldy district of Perthshire during the course of the years 1955, 1956 and 1957, the area chosen being the stretch of some 10 miles of the Tay Valley that lies between Kenmore and Grandtully. Most of the farms and old crofting settlements in this area were visited and traces of many cruck-framed buildings were found. Only four buildings were discovered,<sup>2</sup> however, in which the crucks remained complete and were at the same time accessible for the purpose of making measured drawings. It was thought worth while, therefore, to include here descriptions of two additional buildings, which stand just outside the area surveyed, being situated at Lawers, on Loch Tayside, some 7 miles SW. of Kenmore.

These six buildings, and, indeed, the great majority of the cruck-framed structures noticed in the area, have certain features in common. All are simple rectangular buildings, a single main storey in height, some of them containing lofts. The masonry is of local rubble laid either without mortar or in clay mortar only; the walls, which have a pronounced batter, average about 2 ft. 9 ins. in thickness at base and rise to a height of about 6 ft., except in the case of the peat-shed at Camserney (No. 3), where the walls are only 4 ft. 6 ins. high. The window openings are small, some of them being unglazed; doors and windows are lintelled in either wood or stone. The buildings are gable-ended and the roofs were originally of thatch.

<sup>1</sup> Descriptions of some cruck-framed buildings may be found in A. Roussell, *Norse Building Customs in the Scottish Isles*; C. Sinclair, *The Thatched Houses of the Old Highlands*; J. Walton, "Cruck-framed Buildings in Scotland," in *Gwerin*, 1, No. 3 (June 1957), and "The Skye House," in *Antiquity*, xxxi, No. 123 (September 1957). Information has also been collected by the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from "Hogg's Cottage," Dull, which was planned by J. Walton. ("Cruck-framed Buildings in Scotland," in *Gwerin*, 1, No. 3 (June 1957), fig. 3.)

No. 1. *Lilac Cottage, Dull.* NN 806492.

This building (fig. 1) stands about 65 yds. SE. of the parish church of Dull, which is just over 3 miles W. of Aberfeldy. It runs roughly W. and E. and measures 31 ft. 6 ins. by about 16 ft. 6 ins. over all. The structure is well preserved and is in use as a dwelling house; the thatched roof remains beneath the present covering of iron. After the erection of the house a small building, probably a byre, was added to the west gable; this addition no longer stands. The entrance doorway of the cottage is centrally placed in the south wall and on either side of it there is a window; there is a third window in the east gable. Within the entrance doorway there is a small

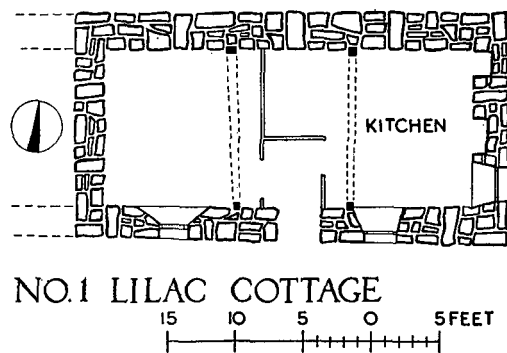


Fig. 1.

lobby from which access is gained to two rooms, one of which occupies the east end of the house and the other the west end. In the east room, which probably served as a kitchen in the original arrangement, there is a stone-built fireplace, with a sweep, in the gable wall. The apartment on the west, which is separated from the kitchen by a wooden partition, has no fireplace. This room was probably used as a parlour and bedroom<sup>1</sup> and was no doubt provided with a hanging chimney of lath and plaster of which no trace now remains. A loft runs the full length of the building. There are two pairs of crucks. Each pair rises from a point about 2 ft. above floor level, but the couples do not meet at the apex, being joined by a "yoke" a little below the ridge. The ridge itself is supported by additional cross-pieces which are wedged in above the yoke. Below the yoke one pair of crucks seems to have had a collar-beam, now represented by a short horizontal spar which is pegged to each of the principals.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Writing of a house of this type in about 1792, Heron says "one end of the house was appropriated to the purposes of a bedroom, storeroom, cellar, pantry and apartment for the accommodation of strangers . . . the other was the kitchen." R. Heron, *Observations made in a Journey through the Western Counties of Scotland*, I, 223.

<sup>2</sup> Drawings of the crucks in this building are given by J. Walton ("Cruck-framed Buildings in Scotland," in *Gwerin*, I, No. 3 (June 1957), fig. 3), who also gives a plan and section of "Hogg's Cottage," which stands about 50 yds. NE. of Lilac Cottage (*ibid.*). The two buildings closely resemble each other in overall dimensions, in plan, and in the details of their cruck frameworks.

*No. 2. Smithy, Lawers.* NN 677398. (Pl. III (c).)

This building (fig. 2) stands about 200 yds. W. of the bridge by which the main Aberfeldy-Killin road (A 827) crosses the Lawers Burn, and about 25 yds. SW. of the house described under No. 4. It runs roughly NW. and SE. and measures about 33 ft. by about 19 ft. over all. The structure is now roofless and is falling into decay but it is said locally to have been used at first as a smithy and later as a barn. Subsequent to the erection of the smithy a byre was added to its south-east gable, but this is now reduced almost to its foundations although a small sheepfold has been

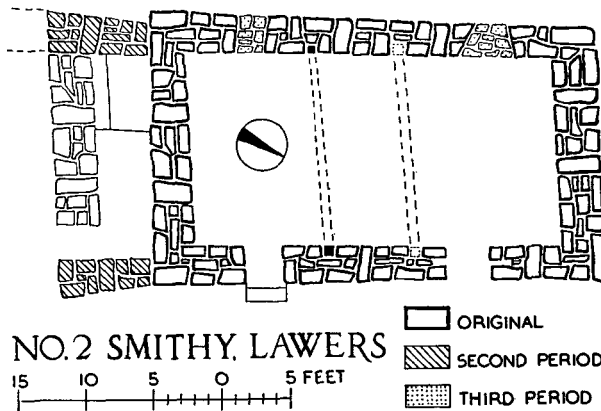


Fig. 2.

contrived at its north-west end. In the smithy itself there are two doorways in the north-east wall and a doorway and a window, both blocked up, in the south-west wall; there is another smaller window high up in the north-west gable. It is uncertain whether or not all these openings are original and in the absence of any indications of internal partitions the original plan of the building is uncertain. When the structure was used as a smithy, however, there were probably two main internal divisions, the one to the NW. comprising a living room and the one to the SE. being the workshop. There is now no trace of a fireplace. The roof was carried on two pairs of crucks, somewhat unequally spaced, of which the south-east pair alone survives. In the remaining couple (fig. 9) the principals rise from a point between 2 ft. and 3 ft. above floor level and cross at the apex to carry the ridge. A little below the apex there are pegs for a collar-beam, now missing.

*No. 3. Peat-shed, Camserney Farm.* NN 816493. (Pl. IV (c).)

This structure (fig. 3) now forms one of a number of outbuildings on Camserney Farm,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles W. of Aberfeldy. It stands a few yards to the SW. of the old house described under No. 6. The building runs roughly

N. and S. and measures about 33 ft. by about 15 ft. over all. It is said locally to have been a peat-shed and it is now used for storing tools; the structure is in good condition but the thatch has been replaced by a corrugated iron roof. There are no doors or windows, access being obtained from the north side, which stands open. Within, there are three pairs of crucks (fig. 9), which spring from a height about 3 ft. above floor level; the couples cross at the apex to carry the roof and have collar-beams. The crucks have a pronounced elbow shape.

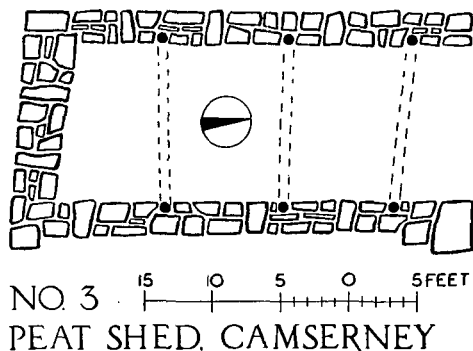


Fig. 3.

*No. 4. House, Lawers.* NN 677398. (Pl. III (b).)

This building (fig. 4) stands about 25 yds. NE. of No. 2.<sup>1</sup> The structure, which is not all of the same period, runs roughly W. and E. and comprises an original house, to the east gable of which there has been added a second house, to the east gable of which there was added subsequently a third building, probably a byre. The byre is now ruinous; the remainder of the building retains its roof, but is unoccupied and is now falling into decay. The original house measures about 44 ft. 6 ins. by about 19 ft. 6 ins. over all. There is a doorway a little to the W. of centre in the south wall and on either side of it a window; there is a second doorway at the east end of the south wall. A single window is set a little to the W. of centre in the north wall. The disposition of the openings, together with what remains of the internal arrangements suggests that the building contained both living space and byre under the same roof. The west portion of the structure seems to have formed a dwelling of very much the same size as Lilac Cottage (No. 1) the internal arrangements of which it may have repeated; the eastern end of the building, which was partitioned off, no doubt contained the byre. This had its own entrance doorway but would communicate with

<sup>1</sup> Both buildings, together with others which have now disappeared, can apparently be identified on an estate plan of 1769. (H.M. Register House, Breadalbane Collection, D. 14; M. McArthur, *Survey of Loch Tayside, S.H.S.*, 3rd ser., xxvii, opp. 3.)

the dwelling. The stone fireplace in the west gable is an addition and may replace an older hanging chimney; the roughly formed fireplace with a wooden box-flue in the east room of the house seems comparatively modern, but may replace an older fireplace. The west portion of the building, at least, had a loft. There are three pairs of crucks (fig. 9); they spring from a height of about 3 ft. above floor level and cross at the apex to support the ridge. Each pair has a collar-beam a little below the apex.

The house that has been added to the east gable of the earlier building measures about 31 ft. 6 ins. by about 18 ft. over all and corresponds both in dimensions and in plan to the west portion, or dwelling space, of the older house. The internal arrangements probably resembled those of Lilac Cottage (No. 1). Some traces remain of a hanging chimney against the west gable; there was originally a loft. There are two pairs of crucks, similar in form to the ones in the older house; they have no collar-beams, however, but the joists supporting the loft acted as ties, being checked into the couples at wall-head level. When a byre was added to the E. a door was broken through the east gable of this house to give access to it.

*No. 5. Tigh-na-Coillie, Boltachan. NN 847499.*

This building (fig. 5) stands at the west end of the hamlet of Boltachan,  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile NW. of Aberfeldy; it runs roughly W. and E. and measures about 42 ft. 6 ins. by 16 ft. 4 ins. over all. The structure has been somewhat altered and is now used as a hen-house, but it is said locally to have been originally a dwelling house. An entrance doorway is centrally placed in the south wall but this appears to be the only original opening, the doorways at the west and east ends of the south wall being recent insertions and the one in the centre of the north wall an enlarged window. The south wall is now buttressed towards its east end. As the position of the original doors and windows is to a large extent uncertain and as no trace of the former internal arrangements remains, it is impossible to say anything of the original plan of the building. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that the structure corresponds in its overall dimensions to the oldest portion of the house at Lawers (No. 4), which contained both living accommodation and byre under the same roof. There are three pairs of crucks (fig. 9), the couples of which spring from a height of about 3 ft. 6 ins. above floor-level and cross at the apex to carry the ridge; below the apex there is a collar-beam.

*No. 6. Long House, Camserney Farm. NN 816493. (Pls. III (a), IV (a) and (b).)*

This building stands a few yards to the NW. of the peat shed described under No. 3. As it is undoubtedly the most interesting structure discovered during the course of the survey and as it differs in many respects from the buildings already noted, it is described in some detail here. The building runs roughly W. and E. and measures about 72 ft. 6 ins. by about

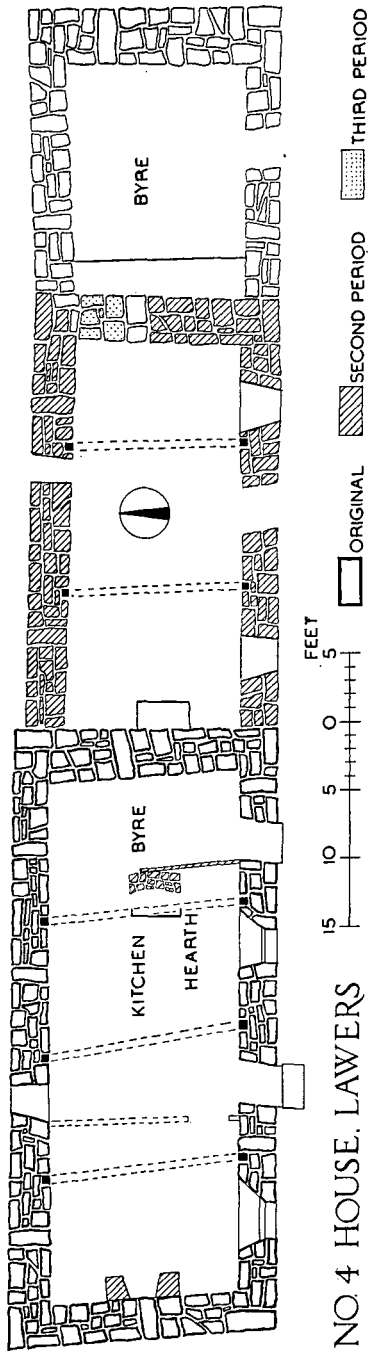


Fig. 4.

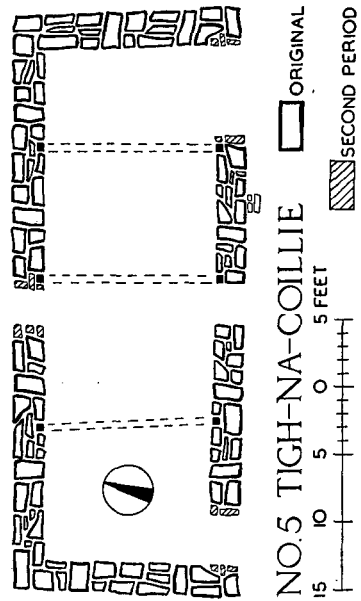


Fig. 5.

17 ft. 9 ins. over all; a small outshot has at some time be added to the east gable, but this is now ruinous. When first visited in August 1955, the building retained its thatched roof, but this had ceased to be waterproof and damage was being done to the interior, some of the features of which are of considerable interest. Thanks to grants from the Russell Trust and from the Trustees for the Highland Folk Museum (Am Fasgadh), however, a temporary but waterproof covering was placed over the west portion of the building early in 1957, and the more interesting items of furniture were moved to this end of the house.

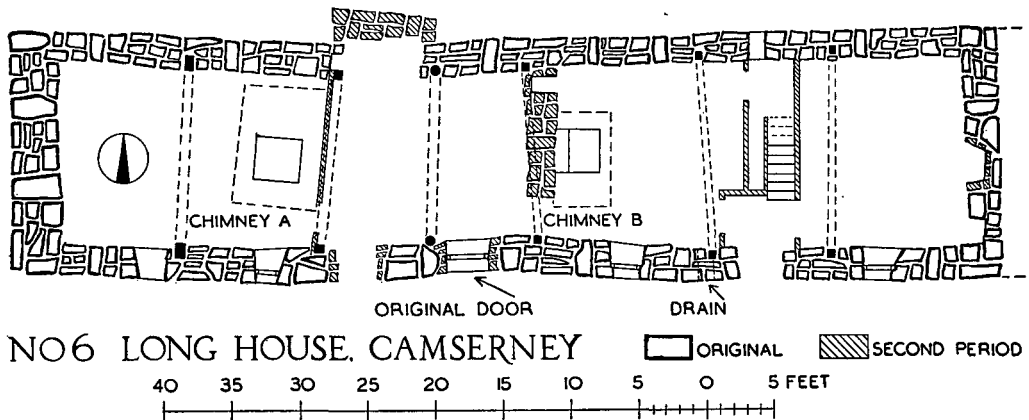
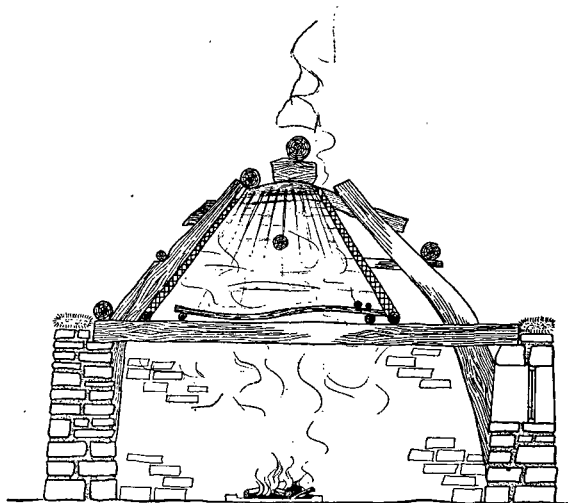


Fig. 6.

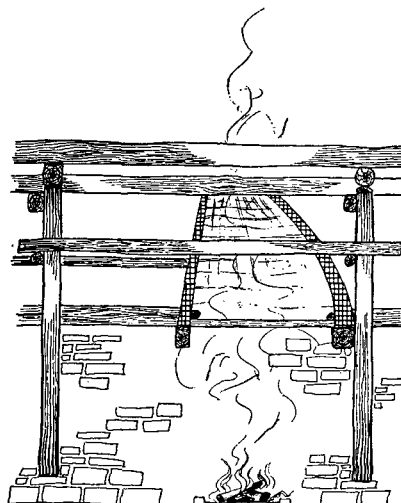
The principal features of the structure may be deduced from a study of the plan (fig. 6), and it is clear that latterly, at least, the building contained two dwelling houses of approximately the same size and with similar internal arrangements. The houses are separated by a stone partition in which there was a communicating door. The west house contains two apartments, which are separated by a thin wooden partition. The west room, presumably the kitchen, contains a stone hearth above which there is a hanging chimney (fig. 7); on the north side of the east room the wall has been extruded to form a bed recess, but this is not an original feature. Above the east room there was a loft. The front door of the east house opens into a lobby from which access can be gained to the kitchen on the W. and to a room on the E. which served as a parlour and bedroom. The kitchen has a hanging chimney (fig. 8) which is built against the stone partition that separates the two houses. To the N. of the fireplace a wooden salt-box is built into the partition. The parlour has a stone fireplace in the east gable; it is said that box beds formerly occupied the north part of the room. From the lobby a wooden stair ascends to a loft, which runs the full length of the

house; behind the stair there is a small apartment, lit by a window to the N. and reached from the kitchen.

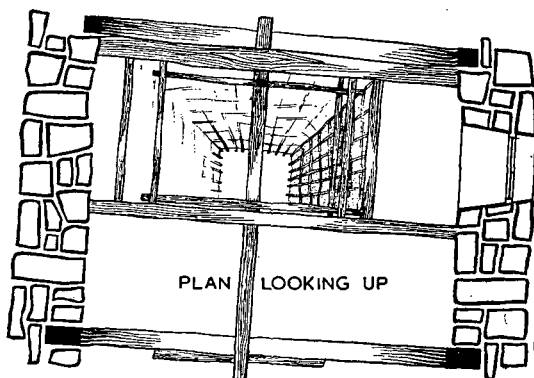
The west house contains three pairs of crucks and the east house two



SECTION LOOKING EAST



SECTION LOOKING NORTH



PLAN LOOKING UP

CHIMNEY "A"  
LONG HOUSE,  
CAMSERNEY

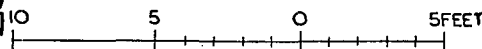


Fig. 7.

pairs; a sixth pair follows the line of the stone partition that separates the houses. The crucks (fig. 9) are similar to the ones in Lilac Cottage (No. 1). The principals, which rest on stone slabs about 1 ft. above floor-level, rise to a yoke, while an additional spar, which rests on the yoke, supports the ridge. Below the yoke there is a collar-beam. In the easternmost pair of



crucks, however, the couples rise only about 3 ft. above the level of the wall head; from this point, upper members, which are joined to each of the principals by wooden pegs, rise to meet at the apex, which supports the ridge. Presumably this device was resorted to either because principals of sufficient length were not available, or because the upper parts of the original principals became rotten. In addition to the six pairs of crucks already mentioned, there is a seventh pair of principals, apparently rising

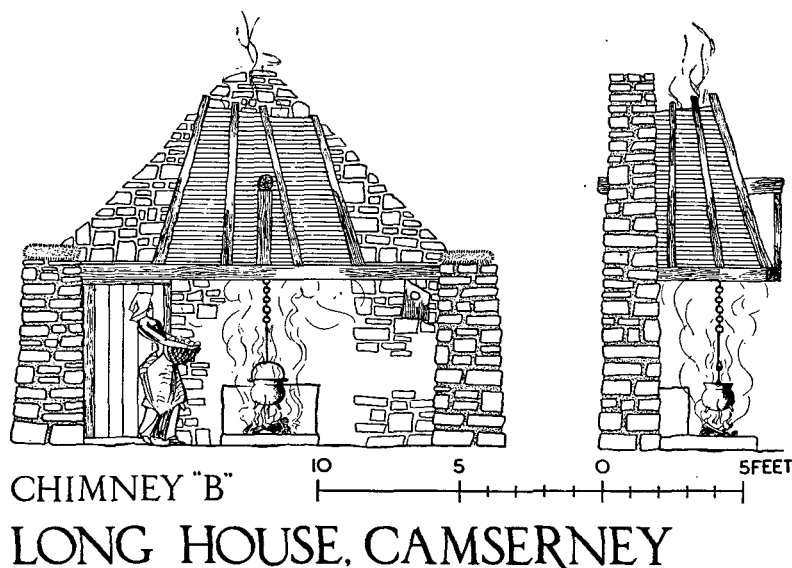


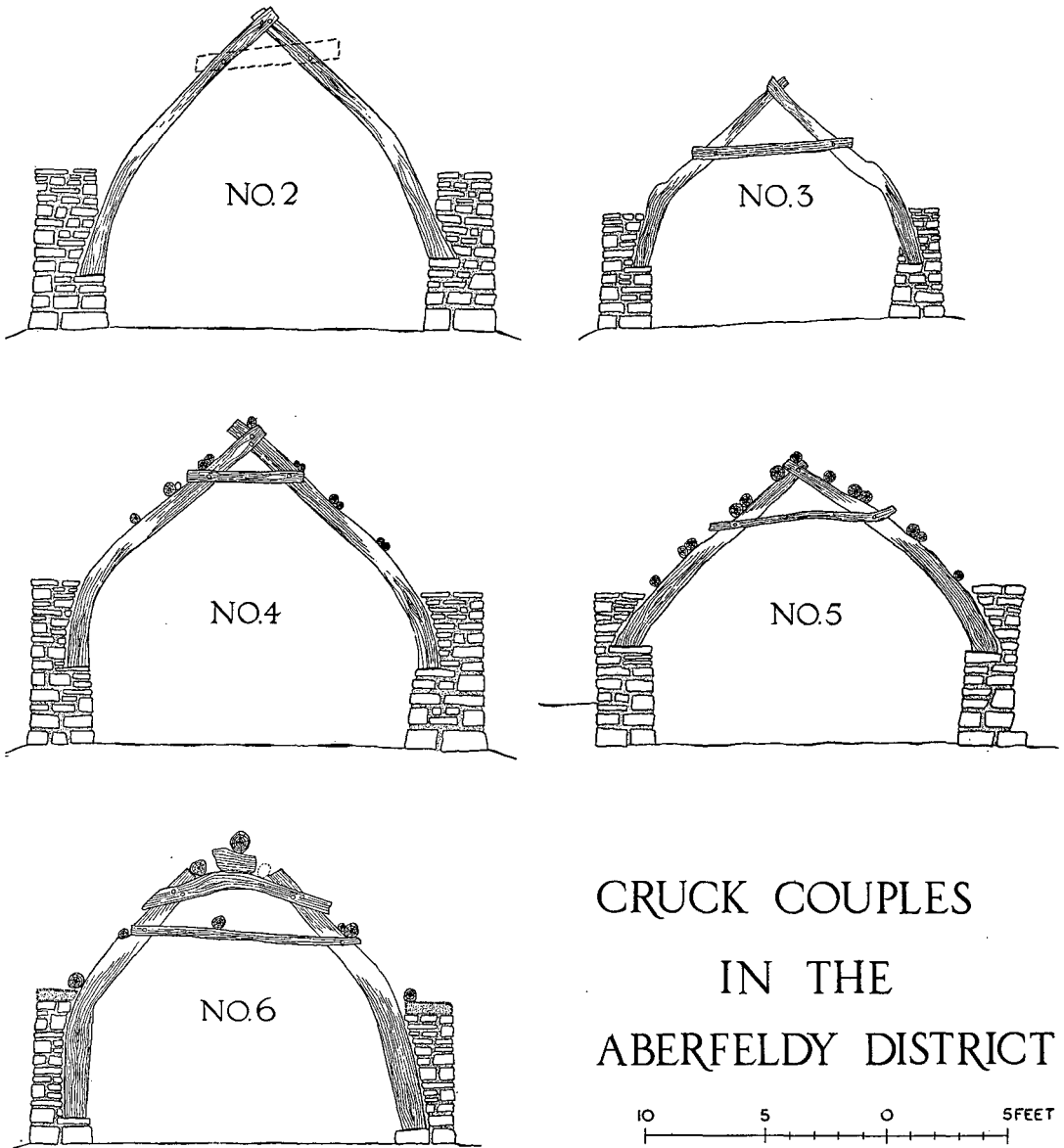
Fig. 8.

only from the wall head, about 3 ft. 6 ins. to the E. of the stone partition; this does not appear to be an original feature.

It has been assumed that the building always comprised two dwelling houses,<sup>1</sup> but although this was undoubtedly the case during the latest period of occupation, it seems more likely that the structure was at first a "long house,"<sup>2</sup> containing both house and byre under the same roof. In this arrangement the building appears to have contained two main divisions, as at present. The west division, which formed the house, was entered by a door at the east end, a little to the E. of the present doorway; the old doorway is now blocked and has been turned into a window, but the outline of the jambs is visible in the masonry. A front door in this position would provide ready access both to the house and to the byre, which no doubt occupied the east division of the building. The internal arrangements of

<sup>1</sup> Walton, "Cruck-framed Buildings in Scotland," in *Gwerin*, I, No. 3 (June 1957), 112-14.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for example, the long houses at Big Bruach and Little Bruach, Glean Dubh, Stirlingshire. R.C.A.M. *Inventory of Stirlingshire* (forthcoming).



CRUCK COUPLES  
IN THE  
ABERFELDY DISTRICT

Fig. 9.

the house are uncertain but the central position of the fireplace suggests that it may have contained a single large apartment only, with the fire in the middle of the floor. The house was separated from the byre by a partition of wood or stone,<sup>1</sup> but there was through communication between the two divisions, as at present, although the byre also possessed its own entrance doorway. The identification of the east division as a byre is supported by the presence of a drain at the base of the south wall, a little to the W. of the doorway. Further, the fireplace in the east gable of the byre appears to be an insertion, while the hanging chimney against the stone partition is certainly later in date than the canopy above the hearth in the west division, being made of lath and plaster as opposed to wattle and daub. From all this it would appear probable that the internal arrangements of the east division are secondary, being the result of the conversion of the byre of an original "long house" into a separate dwelling. To this period too may be ascribed the blocking up of the old front door of the west division and the insertion of the present doorway to the W. of it.

Few general conclusions can be drawn from the study of only six buildings. It is perhaps worth pointing out, however, that two distinct types of cruck construction are found in this small area, two of the buildings (Nos. 1 and 6) having crucks in which the principals rise to a yoke, while in the remaining buildings the principals cross at the apex. Without exception the crucks are very crudely formed, being at best only roughly dressed with an adze; some trees are left in the round, others have been sawn down the middle to provide a pair of couples. Different varieties of trees were used to provide crucks, oak, Scots pine, ash and silver birch being the principal species noted.

The date at which any of these buildings was erected is not known, although Nos. 2 and 4 seem to have been built before 1769 (*supra*), but from the remarks made by travellers to Perthshire at the end of the 18th century it would appear that structures of the type noted in the survey were still in general use at that period. Marshall, in writing of his observations in central and northern Perthshire in 1792 and 1793, says: "The houses and office buildings of ordinary farmers are of dry stone; the dwelling-house being stopt on the inside with loam, to prevent the wind from blowing through the walls; which are seldom more than five or six ft. high; perhaps without glass in the windows, and with door-ways so low that even a middle-sized man must stoop. . . . The roof is set on with 'couples,' or large principal rafters, stept in the walls two or three feet above the foundation; generally upon large stones set to receive their feet. Upon these couples, lines of 'pantrees,' or purlines are fixed, and, resting on these, rough boughs are laid, rafter wise, and termed 'cabbers;' upon these, 'divot,' or thin turf, laid on in the manner of slates; and upon this sod

<sup>1</sup> There are some indications that the present stone partition is not original.

covering, a coat of thatch; composed of straw, rushes, heather or fern.”<sup>1</sup> Robertson, writing in 1799, remarks that many farmers were beginning to live in two-storeyed houses, substantially built in stone and lime, and with slate roofs. But “in several places, the houses of the ordinary tenantry are still mean; the farmer and his cattle lodge under the same roof, with separate entries and only a partition between them.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, although the buildings noted in this survey are no doubt for the most part of 18th-century date, and although the erection of structures of this sort probably continued into the first part of the 19th century, there is no reason to doubt that they merely preserve and continue a much older tradition, the origin and antiquity of which is not yet established.

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *General View of the Agriculture of the Central Highlands of Scotland*, 19 ff.

<sup>2</sup> J. Robertson, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Perth*, 51-2.



(a) Long House, Camserney Farm.



(b) House, Lawers.



(c) Smithy, Lawers.

