

**NETHER LEASK STEADING**  
**SLAINS**  
**ABERDEENSHIRE**



**Standing Building Survey**  
Carried out January 10<sup>th</sup> 2012  
by  
**Murray Archaeological Services Ltd**



**Report No: MAS 2012-2**  
by  
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# **NETHER LEASK STEADING SLAINS ABERDEENSHIRE**

## **- Standing Building Survey -**

### **1. Background**

1.1 A standing building survey was required for one of the steading buildings at Nether Leask, Slains, Aberdeenshire, prior to their partial demolition for the construction of an agricultural building.

1.2 The archaeological condition (Condition No 4) was applied in the context of planning legislation (PAN 2/2011, SPP, SHEP), which states that it is necessary for developers to arrange for archaeological work to take place prior to development, in appropriate circumstances. Planning Application Number: APP/2011/3361.

1.3 A Level 1 Standing Building Survey was required which includes measured floor plans, a written account of building's plan, form, function, age and development sequence in addition to a photographic survey.

1.4 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned to undertake the work by John Wink Design on behalf of his client David Irvine. The site element of the survey was completed on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

### **2. Desk-top survey**

2.1 A search was carried out in the Sites and Monuments Record, Archaeology Service, Aberdeenshire Council and in the Sites and Monuments Records of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland (RCAHMS) through Canmore, Canmap and Pastmap.

2.2 The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> edition Ordnance Survey maps were consulted.

2.3 Site plans of the site were kindly supplied by John Wink Design and have been annotated and used as a basis for detailed plans of the observed areas.

### 3. The Site

3.1 The site lies at c.45m OD to the E of the Forvie Burn and midway between the A90 Aberdeen to Peterhead road and the A975 coastal road. The farm was originally part of the Slains Estate (pers. comm. David Irvine). It is one of a group of properties surrounding Leask House (Mains of Leask, Mill of Leask, Milltown of Leask).

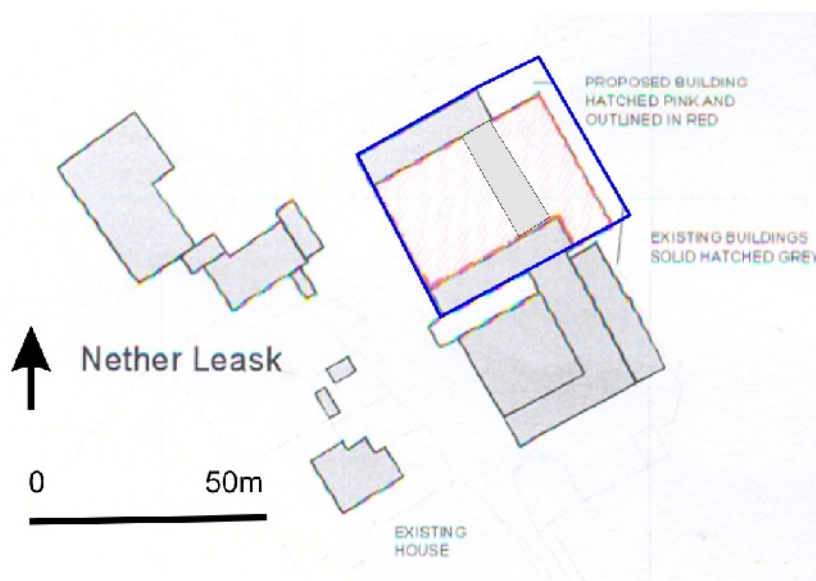
Parish: Slains

GPS: 402148, 832589 (centre of W side of building referred to in report)

RCAHMS No: NK03SW 56 (NGR NK 0214 3256)



Illus 1 The site, general view from the NW



Illus 2 Overall site plan (Annotated from plan by John Wink Design)

3.2 The development refers to the N half of the main steading block. A new building (Illus 2: outlined in red) is to be constructed between the original stone-walled N and S ranges which will be preserved. The existing E range will be demolished as will the more recent infill of the open court. The standing building report is confined to the area of the new construction (outlined in blue) although the development of the whole steading complex is discussed.

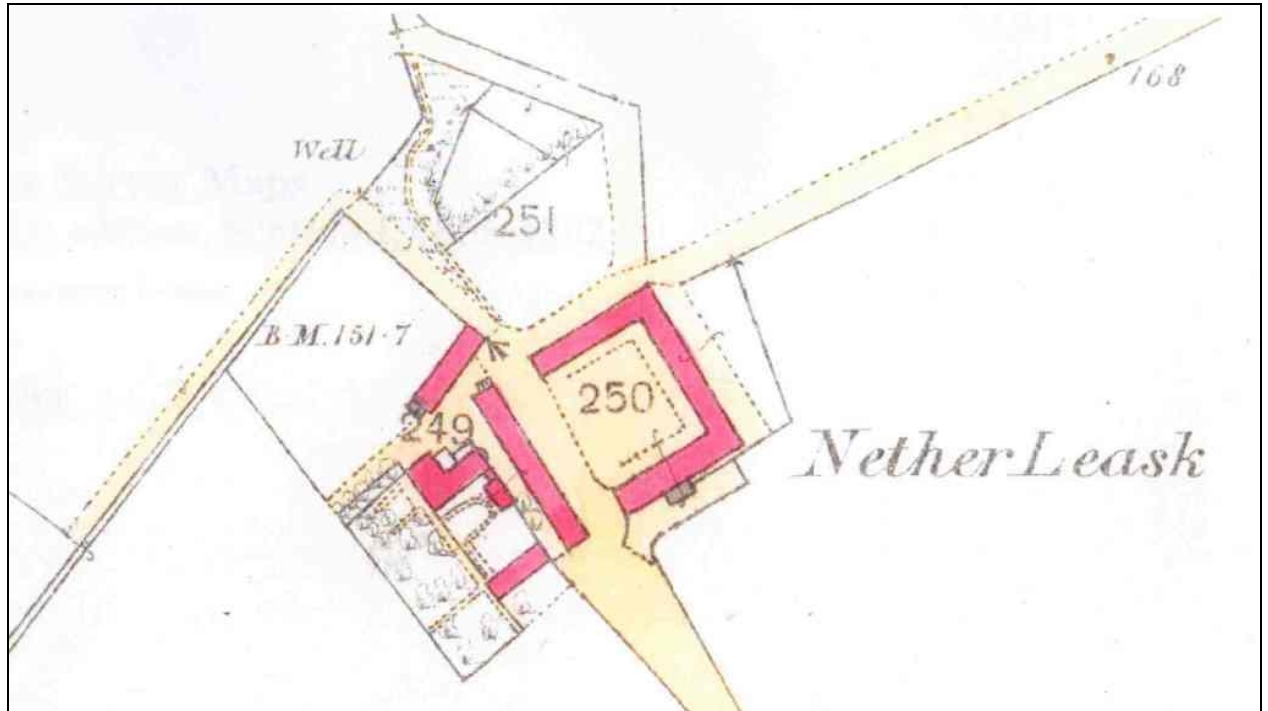
#### 4. Documentary evidence

4.1 The Leask family appear to have owned land in the area from at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 1341-1346 a *Charter of Confirmation of the Leask Lands of Leskgoroune* was granted by David II, son of Robert the Bruce, to William Lesk (<http://www.clan-leask.org.uk>).

4.2 Roy's Military Map of 1747/55 shows five settlement clusters at Leask; Lish house (*sic*), Cott of Lish (*sic*), Mill of Lisk (*sic*), Newton of Lisk (*sic*) and Nether Lisk (*sic*). Nether Leask is shown as an unenclosed cluster of four buildings. Leask House is shown as a single large house within a large tree-surrounded enclosure. The area around all the Leask properties is shown as rig and furrow cultivation.

4.3 The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey 25" map, surveyed in 1867 (published 1871. Aberdeen Sheet XXIX.10. (Slains)) shows the Improved steading, much of which survives. A U-shaped steading open to the W/SW lies on the E side of the road. A dotted line shows a walk around the central dung court. A millwheel is shown on the outer side of the S range, with an arrow showing the flow of water E and then N away from the wheel.

A freestanding range is also shown W of the road, forming the fourth side of the block. The house and two other buildings lie beyond this to the N and W.



Illus 3 1st edition OS map (25"/mile) surveyed 1867, published 1871 ([www.nls.ac.uk](http://www.nls.ac.uk))



Illus 4 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 6"/mile Ordnance Survey of 1899 (pub 1901) ([www.nls.ac.uk](http://www.nls.ac.uk))

4.3 By the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 6"/mile Ordnance Survey of 1899 (published 1901. Aberdeenshire Sheet XXXIX. SW) the additional buildings to the W of the road have been removed and replaced by a small rectangular range of buildings parallel with the Standing Building Survey

N range to the E of the road. To the E of the road a second U-shaped court has been formed by the addition of an L-shaped structure abutting the S/SE of the existing range.



Illus 5 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1”/mile Ordnance Survey of 1907 (pub 1910) ([www.nls.ac.uk](http://www.nls.ac.uk))

4.4 In the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1”/mile Ordnance Survey map of 1907 (published 1910. Peterhead. Sheet 87), the main steading block appears to have been unchanged but a small freestanding building, possibly the bothy that still exists, has been added to the S/SE of the steading, on the E side of the road..

## 5 Methodology

- 5.1 The ground plans have been annotated to show details and to indicate differences in the building materials which may help in understanding the development and history of the building.
- 5.2 The areas recorded were photographed. The full set of photographs will be supplied on CD for the archive and annotated plans in the present report (Illus 26, 27) indicate the position of each.

## 6 The Buildings

### 6.1 *The House*

The farmhouse was not part of the present survey. It is shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map with an elaborate fairly formal garden.

## 6.2 The Steading

The following plan and description refers to the N half of the steading to the E of the road (outlined in blue on Illus 2). This is the earliest part of the steading and is the U-shaped group of buildings shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> OS map of 1867.

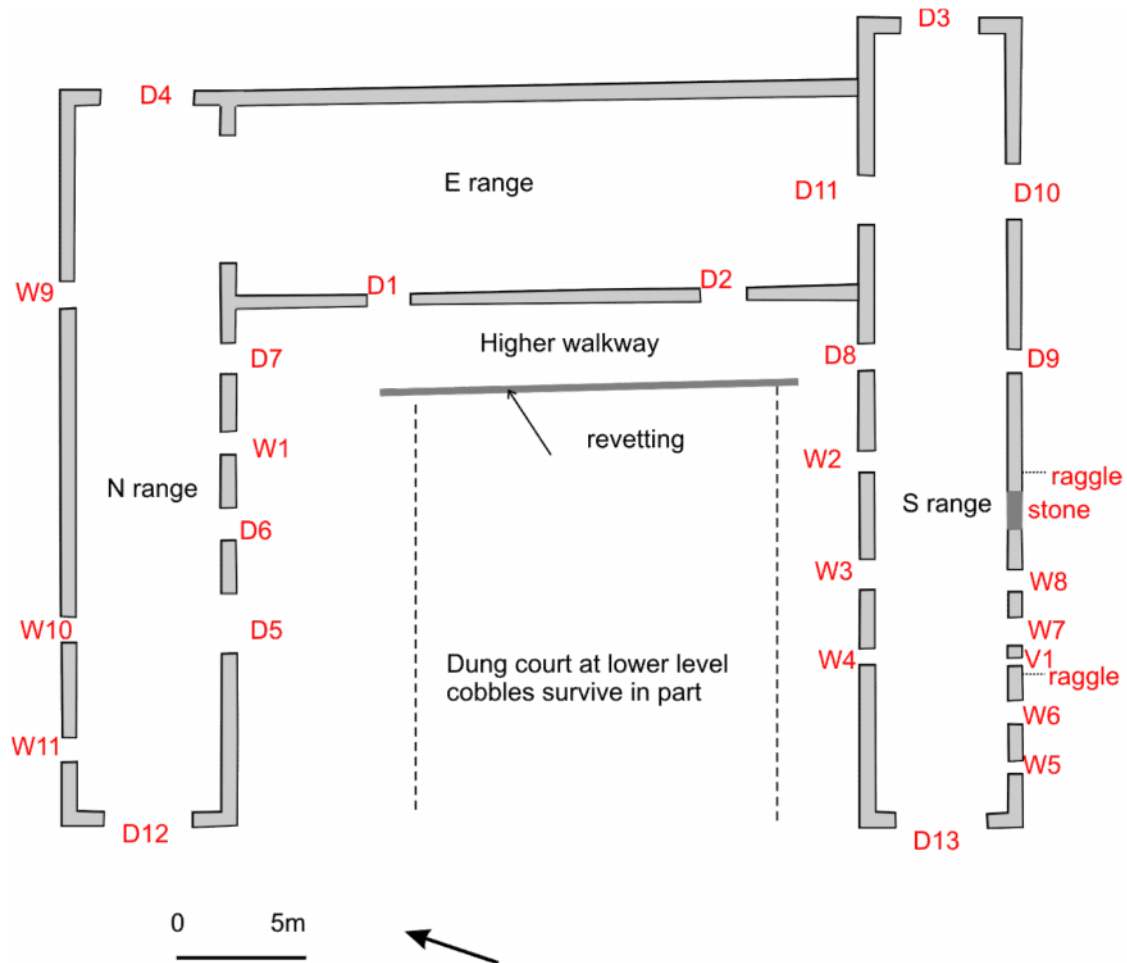


**Illus 6 Steading due for development looking NE**

Dimensions U-shaped steading around open dung court. Total width: N-S ext: 37m  
Maximum length E-W ext: 31m.

Original Use A rectangular steading around open dung court with entry from S/SW.  
Cattle in N and E ranges. S range included mill.

Present/recent use Open court roofed. General use for cattle wintering and storage.



Illus 7 Detailed plan

## Description

### **N RANGE**

**Dimensions** Width ext: 6.4m Length ext: 28.6m

**Walls** Random rubble stone without very strong horizontal coursing. E gable rebuilt with concrete blocks. W gable corner rybats remain but top of gable and door opening rebuilt with concrete blocks.

Where rybats survive at W gable and openings they are all of grey granite with the exception of lintel and one jamb of W9 which are of pink granite.

**Roof** Pitched roof clad with corrugated asbestos with plastic roof lights.

### *Doors and windows*

#### N wall

**W9** W: 840mm H: 420mm. pink granite lintel and 1 jamb, sill and 2<sup>nd</sup> jamb grey granite. Not blocked.

**W10** W: 920mm H: 1.4m. Grey granite lintel, sill and jambs. Concrete blocked.

**W11** W: 920mm H: 1.4m. Grey granite lintel, sill and jambs. Concrete blocked.





Illus 8 W9, W10, W11



Illus 9 N wall of N range looking to SE

S wall

**D5** W: 2.15m H: 2.30m. Grey granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked.

**D6** W: 1.20m H: 2.30m. Grey granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked.

**W1** W: 0.95m H: 1.35m. Grey granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked.

**D7** W: 1.24m H: 2.30m. Grey granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked.



**Illus 10** S wall of N range in background looking N across the open court

E wall

**D4** W: 3.7m. H: 3.6m. Raised and widened.

W wall

**D12** W: 3.4m H: c.4m. Raised and widened.

*Interior* Only the E end of the interior was accessible to approx W9 where there was a wooden partition to roof height.

**S RANGE**

**Dimensions** Width ext: 6.2m Length ext: 31m

*Walls* Random rubble stone, horizontal coursing clear on N wall. E and W gable openings rebuilt with concrete blocks. Where rybats survive at gables and openings they are all of pink granite.

*Roof* Pitched roof on A-frame couples with sarking. Cladding of grey slates with ceramic ridge tiles.

*Doors and windows*

N wall

**D11** W:1.37m H: c.2.1m

**D8** W: 1.25m. H: 2.20m. Pink granite lintel and rybats. Wooden door

**W2** W: 750mm. H:1.10m. Pink granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked. Base of opening at level of walkway. As walkway is later than the S range this would have been a window initially, later it may have acted as ventilator to S range.

**W3** W: 1.20m H:1.20m. As W2.

**W4** W: 750mm. H:1.05m. As W2.



**Illus 11** N wall of S range, looking SE across central court. W2 visible beside ladder



**Illus 12** N wall of S range, Detail of W4, showing walkway has blocked base of wall, making window appear low.

*S wall*

**W5** W: 470mm. H: 450+mm. Pink granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked, Ground level raised so original height not clear (internal side of wall concrete rendered obscuring detail).

**W6** W: 1.0m H: 450+mm. Pink granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked, Ground level raised so original height not clear (internal side of wall concrete rendered obscuring detail).

**V1** W: 300mm H: 350mm. Concrete blocks surround. Recent.

**W7** W: 1.08m H: 600+mm. Pink granite lintel and rybats. Concrete blocked, Ground level raised so original height not clear (internal side of wall concrete rendered obscuring detail).

**W8** W: 790mm. H: 500+mm. Small window with 2-paned glass. Pink granite one side, other side re-built in red brick.

**Stone** W: 790mm H: 500mm. At present ground level. Pink granite, possible shaping of under side. May be the upper stone around mill wheel shaft.

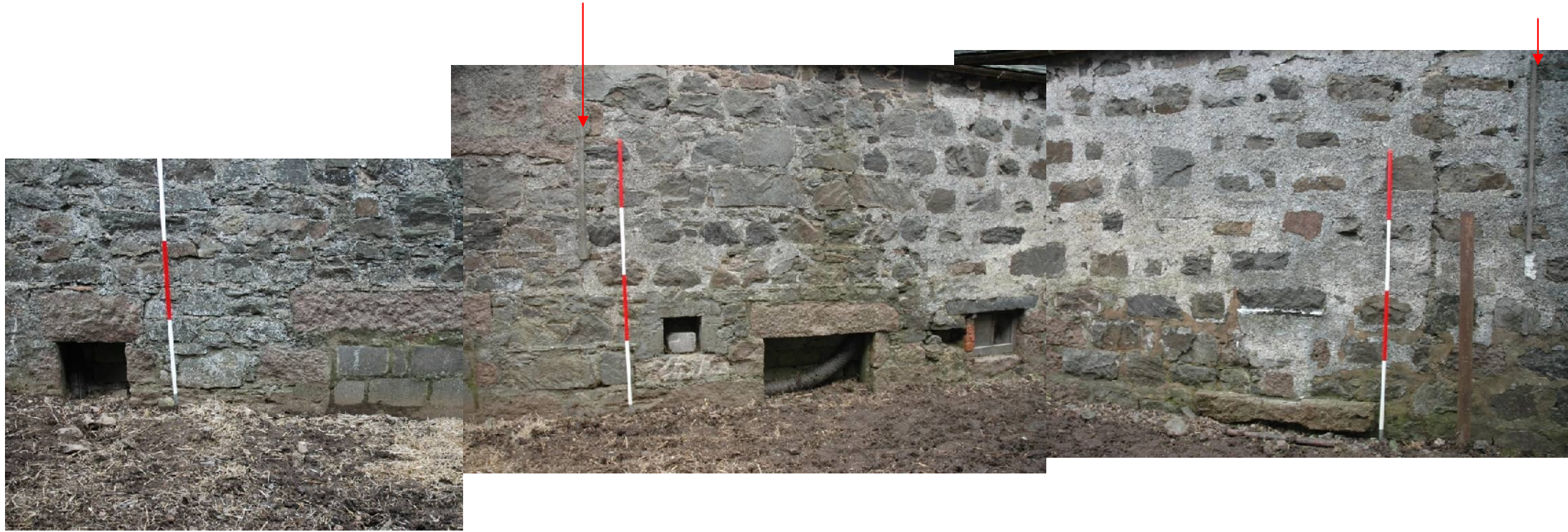
**D9** W: 240mm H: 2.20m. Sliding door. Modern.

**D10** W: 2.10m H: 2m+ widened on one side.

**Raggles** Vertical raggles suggest a lean-to structure had extended against the outer face of the S wall enclosing V1, W7, W8 and the stone. The length of this structure was approx 8m.



**Illus 13** Oblique view looking E along S wall of S range. W5 in foreground



**Illus 14** Details of W5, W6, V1, W7, W8, possible wheel axle setting stone and W8. Raggles of lean-to marked by red arrows

E wall

**D3** W: 4.7m H: 3.95m. Raised and widened.

W wall

**D13** W: 3m H: 2.8m ( loading ramp so this is deceptive). Raised and widened.

*Interior*

Much of interior was concrete rendered so no detail visible. Cattle were being in-wintered at time of survey.



**Illus 15** Looking into S range from W

**E RANGE**

*Walls*

Rubble stone in rough courses. The N and S walls of the E range abut and are later than the walls of the S range.



**Illus 16 E range E wall looking S**



**Illus 17 Interior of E range central concrete drain and original cobbles just visible.**

### *Roof*

A-framed with king posts. Sarked. Grey slate cladding with ceramic ridge tiles and ridge vents and metal-framed skylights.

### *Doors and windows*

#### *W wall*

**D1** W: 1.75m. H: 2.05m. Widened with concrete blocks. Lintel missing.

**D2** W: 1.2m. H: 1.95m. Stone lintel. Wooden door.

*Interior*

Although the central drain along mid-line of floor had been concreted, the original cobbling survived over much of floor.

**CENTRAL COURT**

The central court was approx. 14 x 16m at a low level with a walkway around 3 sides. On the S and E sides the walkway was c.3-3.5m in width. On the N side it was c. 6.9m wide and appeared to have been widened. At the front the floor level was c. 700mm below the walkway, at the back it was c. 900mm below the walkway.



**Illus 18 View looking E across central court. Ranging rod stands beside revetting of E walkway**

Much of the floor of the lower area retained its original cobbles and can be regarded as the original level. The walkway beside the E range was at the same level as the floor cobbles within the E range and can therefore also be regarded as original. The W edge of the walkway on this side retained original stone revetting. This was not visible on the N and S sides. A possible drain through the revetting was photographed in the SE corner (Illus 19).



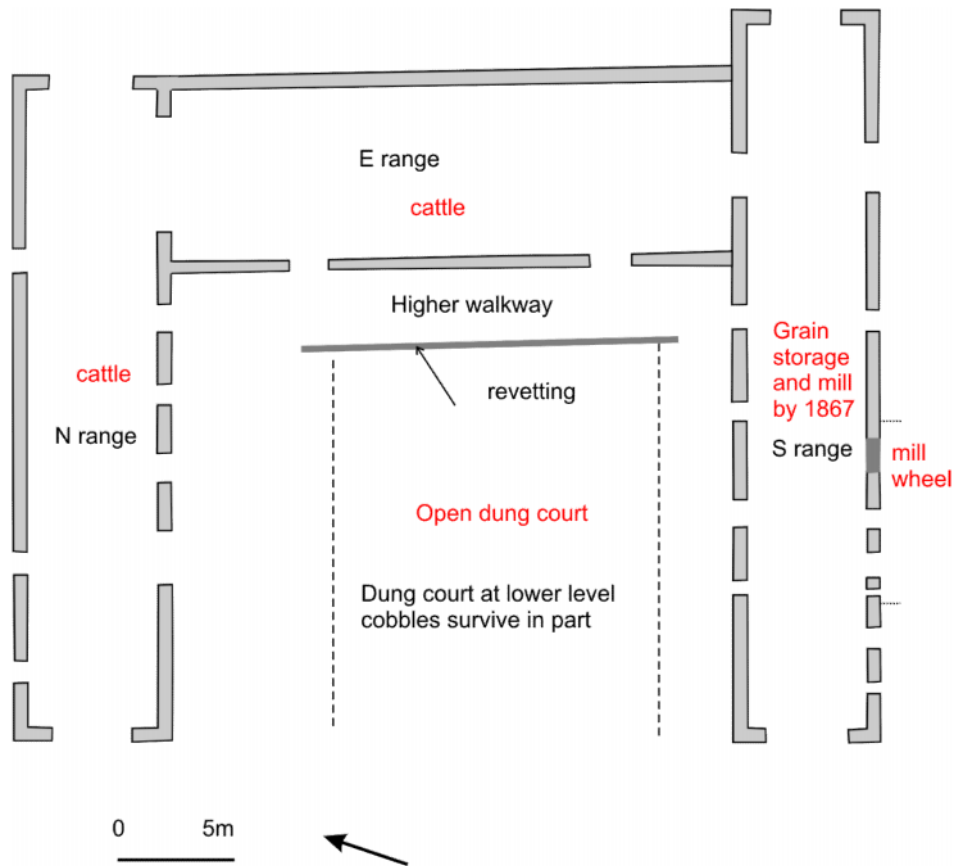


**Illus 19 Possible drain in revetting**

At some point, probably *c.* 1950-60, the central court was covered by a steel-framed roof supported on concrete block pillars and clad with asbestos.

## 7 Discussion

Nether Leask is a fairly typical Aberdeenshire improvement steading, probably dating from *c.* 1800 with development throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (RCAHMS 2007, 208. Glendinning and Wade Martins 2008, 119-120). Although little internal detail remained it appears that the N and E ranges were for cattle with an open dung court in the central area. The details of the outer S wall of the S range suggest that this was the position of a mill-wheel for the threshing of grain. This wheel appears to be shown on both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> OS maps, so was in use from at least 1867. The 1867 map appears to show the outflow of the water to the E and then to the N. The stone in this wall may have been the upper stone around the axle of the mill wheel. The wheel pit has been filled in and the interior of the structure cement rendered so no additional detail survives but it can be assumed that the rest of the building would have been used for the storage and processing of grain.



**Illus 20 Building functions**

This U-shaped steading is shown on the 1867 1<sup>st</sup> OS map and is therefore of early 19<sup>th</sup> century date. Internal details such as the use of pink granite for all rybats and lintels in the S range and grey in the N range suggest a difference in date of construction.



**Illus 21 E gables of S range (top) showing pink granite rybats and of N range (below) showing use of grey granite rybats at corners**

As the in-filling E range appears to abut the S range it is suggested that the S range is the earliest with the N and E ranges added.



**Illus 22 E side of E wall of E range abutting S range N wall**

As shown in Illus 4 the documentary evidence shows that a second U-shaped steading was added between 1867 and 1899. The walls of this later court are preserved within a modern roofed building. Part of the original slated roof survives abutting the S side of the S range (Illus 23).

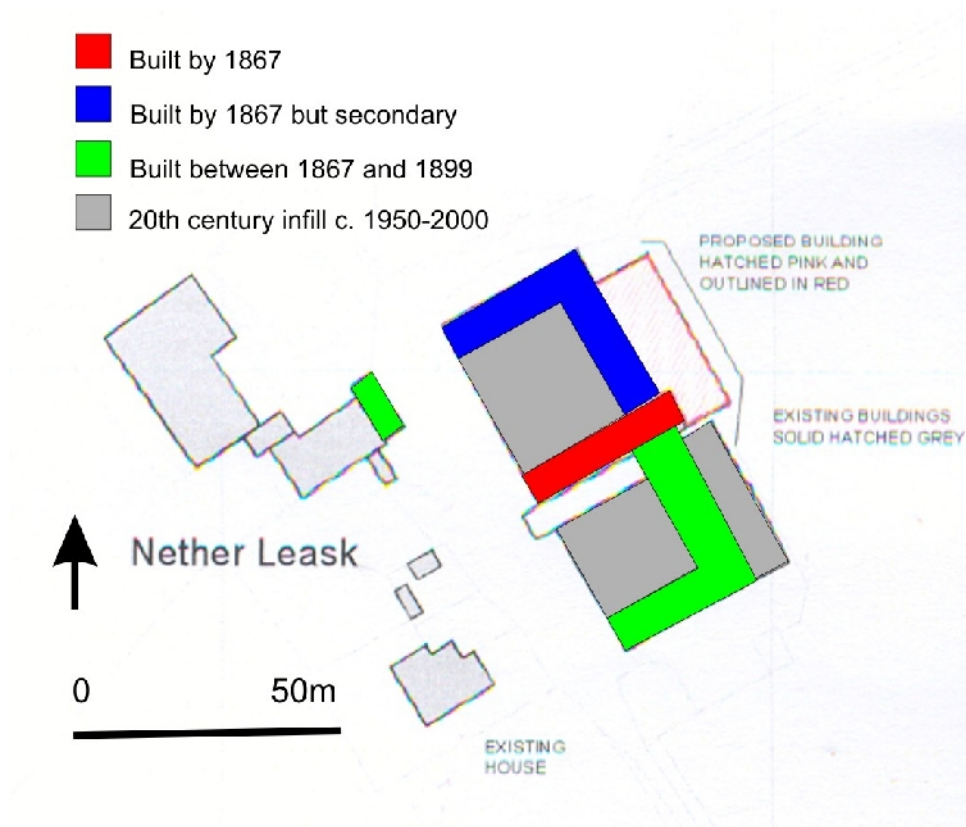


**Illus 23 Roof of later 19<sup>th</sup> century range of buildings abutting S range**

A smaller stone building to the W of the roadway (Illus 24) is also likely to be a remnant of the other later 19<sup>th</sup> century steading on that side of the road.



Illus 24 Later 19<sup>th</sup> century building to E of road.



Illus 25 Suggested sequence of buildings based on observed and documentary evidence  
(Annotated from plan by John Wink Design)

## 8. References

Glendinning, M and Wade Martins, S 2008 Buildings of the Land: Scotland's Farms 1750-2000 Edinburgh: RCAHMS.

RCAHMS 2007 *In the shadow of Bennachie: A Field Archaeology of Donside, Aberdeenshire*. Edinburgh: RCAHMS.

Roy. Military Map of 1747-55 on line at <http://www.nls.uk/maps>

## 9 Archive

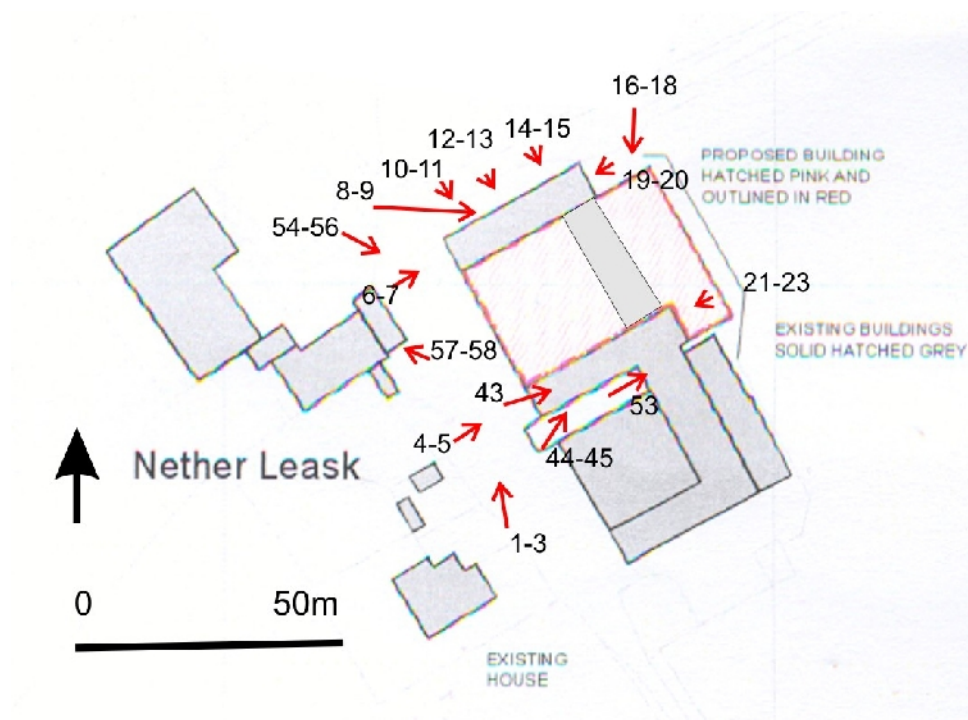
A full set of photographs with the photo location plans will be supplied on CD to the Aberdeenshire SMR in Aberdeen and to the NMRS.

### Appendix 1: Photographic archive

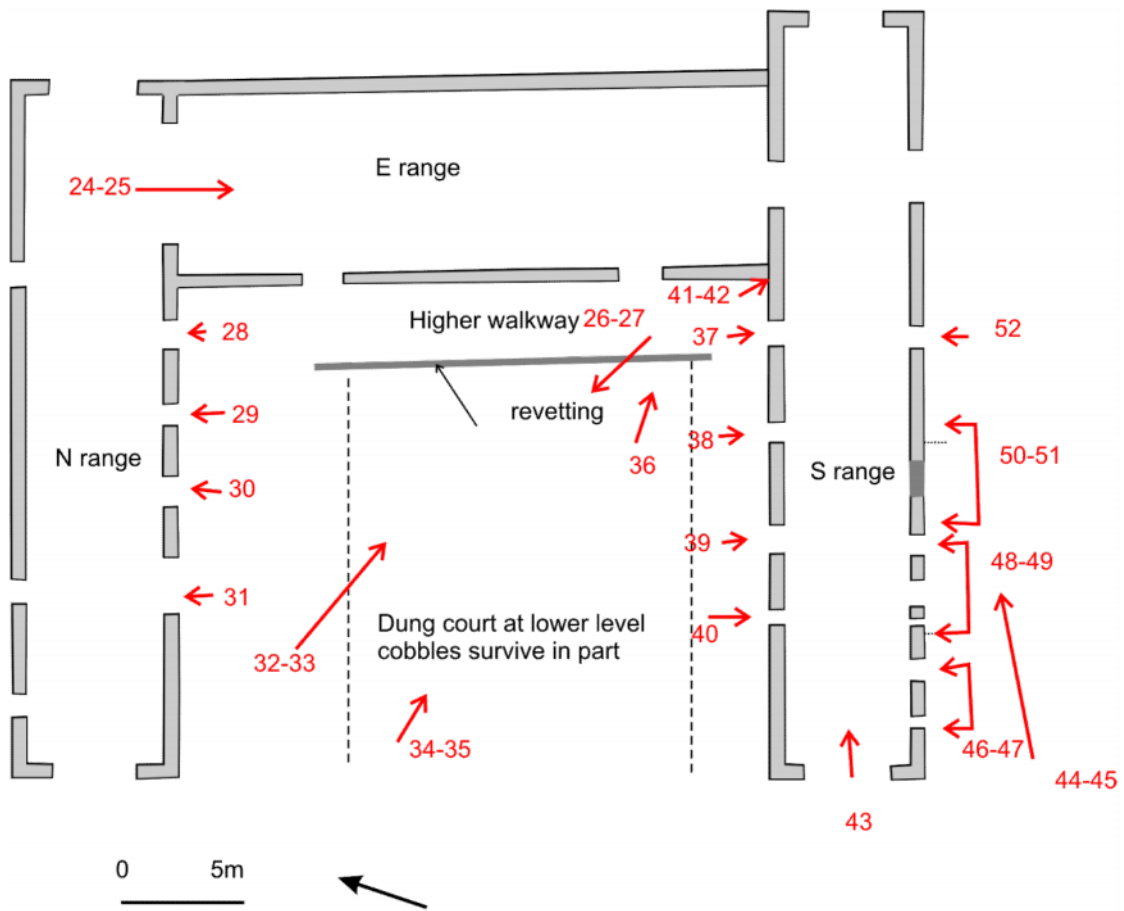
Digital 1-23 External and general: See Illus 26

Digital 24 – 52 Internal and details: See Illus 27

Digital 53- 58 General shots of steading complex: See Illus 26



Illus 26 Photographic references general and external



**Illus 27** Photographic references details and internal

