

SEWING SHIELDS

NORTHUMBERLAND

FARM BUILDING ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE YARD

AN HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT



Distant South View, the building outlined in red.

PETER F RYDER

B.A., M.Phil, F.S.A

HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANT

**The Vicarage
Otterburn
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE19 1NP
01830 520590
E mail: PFRyder@broomlee.org**

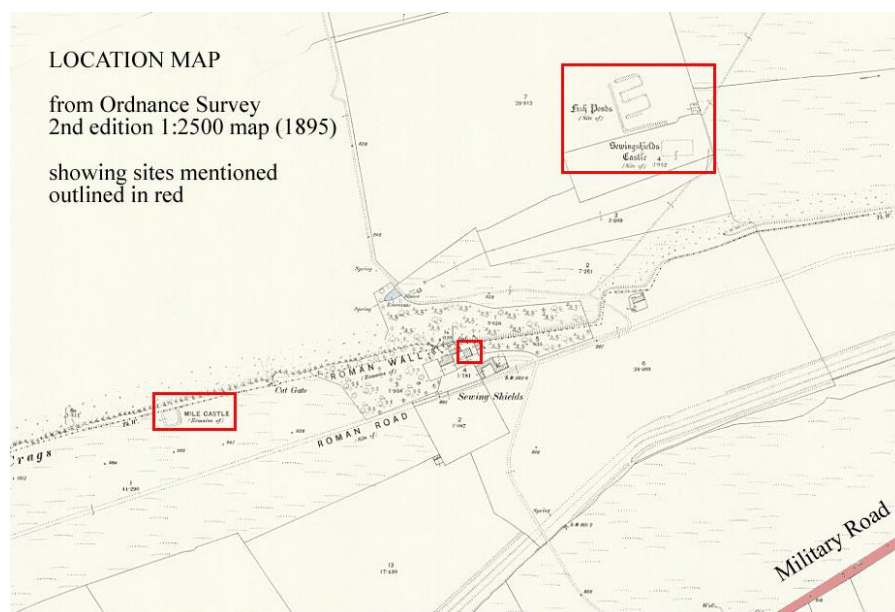


SEWING SHIELDS. FARM BUILDING ON THE EAST OF THE YARD

The farm of Sewing Shields is splendidly sited perched amongst trees on the crest of the whinstone scarp 6.5 km north of Haydon Bridge, right on the line of the Roman Wall, at a point close to where an old road (once referred to as the 'great north road') from Haydon Bridge to Wark and Bellingham crossed the scarp. The site has a long history of occupation since the Romans; the 'shields' part of the name is thought to refer to shielings, temporary dwellings only occupied in the summer, and the 'Sewing' to a personal Anglo-Saxon name 'Sigewine'¹. It is thought that Sewingshields developed from a group of shielings to a permanent settlement, which had acquired manorial status perhaps by the end of the 11th century²

Two late-medieval (13th to 16th century) long-houses were identified during excavations at the Roman Milecastle 35 on Sewingshields Crags, c 500 m west of the farm. They were interpreted as buildings built for storage and shelter, probably in use only for seasonal grazing, by herdsmen normally resident in Sewingshields Castle, which lay in the valley to the north of the farm. Described as a 'fortalice' it was probably no more than a tower house, and was recorded as belonging to Sir Robert Ogle who died in 1437; its remains were largely removed in the 19th century, and the visible earthworks there are thought to represent fishponds. The manor was later held by the Heron family, and declined to 'extreme decay'; in 1606 it was only worth 6s 6d a year, compared with £8 in 1287.

There appears to be nothing pre-dating the late 18th or early 19th century in the present farm and buildings, although from its significant position it would seem likely to have been previously occupied.



¹ Mawer, Allen (1920) Place Names of Northumberland and Durham

² Most of the historical information here is taken from Haigh, D & Savage, M (1984) 'Sewingshields' Archaeologica Aeliana 5th series 12, 33-14

Description

The farm faces south-east towards the Military Road c 500 m away, but for the purposes of this account the orientation is described as if the buildings faced south. The farmhouse is a Grade-II listed building, and described as of early 19th century date. This report is concerned with the farm building which stands at the east end of the group, fronting west onto a yard at the east end of the house itself, and only linked to the other buildings by a short piece of wall (with a doorway) at its north-west corner. It appears to have been used as a stable, with a granary above, with other rooms in the integral outshut at the rear.

The building is a rectangular north-south block 11.1 by 9.5 m externally, over walls 0.65 m thick of coursed roughly-squared stone (now heavily mortared), with cut quoins and dressings and a roof of Welsh slate. It stands on ground falling to the south and east.



The west elevation, towards the yard (above) has a boarded door in an alternating-block surround, immediately to the south of an external stone stair, in the west face of which is a blocked opening hard to interpret. North of the stair is a window with a cut lintel and slightly-projecting sill; the stair rises to an upper doorway into the granary, similar to that below, with on either side a window, that on the south of traditional part-slatted form -the other windows all have relatively recent glazing. The gables have a cut stone coping.

The south end of the building has a ground-floor window of the usual form near its west end, and in the outshut (where the ground is at a lower level) a doorway 1.4 m high and 0.95 m wide with an external rebate to its alternating-block surround. To the east is a

square-headed recess, perhaps a blocked entry for hens, a little over 2 m above the ground, and higher up a small window to the first-floor of the outshut; higher still, above the doorway, is a rectangular opening with a projecting flagstone sill, possibly for pigeons.

The rear (east) elevation of the lower outshut wall has three openings, a boarded hatch near the south end, a small window without any glazing midway along, and further north a former doorway, with an alternating-block surround, partially infilled and converted into an eight-pane casement window.



The north end of the building (above) has a pair of boarded doors, one at the west end into the main body and one further east into the outshut; both have the look of being secondary insertions. In between them a small enclosure is set against the wall, with stone walls c 1.4 m high that have an arched coping, without any openings; this has at one stage been covered by some sort of pent roof, the line of which is traceable, with sockets for timbers surviving at each end. There are no openings to the upper floors, other than one or two pipe vents.

Interior

The ground floor appears to have been a stable; its south-eastern section is now occupied by kennels, of no great age but which retain earlier timber posts suggesting that there were three stall divisions. The first floor is carried by regular sawn softwood joists of upright section. In the west wall to the south of the door is a recess which looks as if it might be formed in a former window opening, although this is not evident in the heavily-mortared external wall face.

The granary above is a single undivided space, with a broad opening in the centre of the east wall, containing a pair of adjacent doors, but now boarded over. The roof is of four bays, with simple principal-rafter trusses carrying two levels of purlins (with cleats) and a ridge board.

The interior of the outshut is quite complex; it is divided into two by a full-height cross wall set south-of-centre. At ground level the larger northern section has had an upper floor, partly removed but with its transverse beams still in situ. It is divided into two parts by a timber screen with a central door. A series of additional more-closely spaced roof timbers against the west wall of both parts been carries an extant area of flooring, which from the close spacing of the timber below (and insertion of one substantial post) seems intended to carry some weighty piece of equipment, quite likely an engine of some sort. Probably associated with this are a number of timber-lined recesses in the west wall, one on the ground floor cut across by the screen; there is a narrower one further south, and just beyond this a vertical groove clearly worn into the wall by some revolving machinery. On the first floor are two further recesses, a broad timber-lined one and a narrow unlined one near the north end. The broad opening from the granary opens onto the extant area of flooring, with two steps down into the outshut. The roof of this section has two half-trusses (with their tie-beams carrying the former floor) which have vertical posts between tie and principal at their mid-points, and carry two levels of purlins.

All these floor timbers appear secondary, as, being set at a height of a little over 2.00 m above the floor they cut across a doorway in the cross wall, 0.6 m above its sill. On the opposite side of the wall, the floor of the southern part of the outshut is set c 0.60 m lower than in the northern part. Here the north-south joists of a former floor remain, a little below the threshold of the door. Lower in the wall, directly beneath the doorway is an irregular blocked opening of some form.

Discussion

The building appears to be of a single date, probably of the early 19th century and possibly contemporaneous with the farmhouse. The provision of windows to the ground floor suggests that its use was as a stable rather than a byre, and the upper floor was almost certainly a granary. The provision of additional space in the integral outshut made it into a multi-purpose building; the south end of the outshut may have housed a pigsty with a henhouse over³, and possibly a pigeon loft above that. What the original function of the northern part was is unclear, but it seems to have been remodelled, perhaps in the early 20th century, with the insertion of an upper floor, to house an engine of some sort, and a large opening created linking it to the granary, where threshing may have been carried out.

The two doorways in the north end of the building both look to be insertions, perhaps relating to changes in function of the various parts of the structure, and most of the window and door carpentry has clearly been renewed. It is not clear whether the roof structure is original – the roofing material, Welsh slate, only became popular in the mid-19th century (with the development of the railway network) so if the building is older than that one would expect some other material – stone slates, pantiles or heather thatch – to have been used. However there is no sign of any of the features – raised gable copings for instance- that usually accompany these – so perhaps the structure was relatively new when depicted on the c1860 Ordnance Survey map.

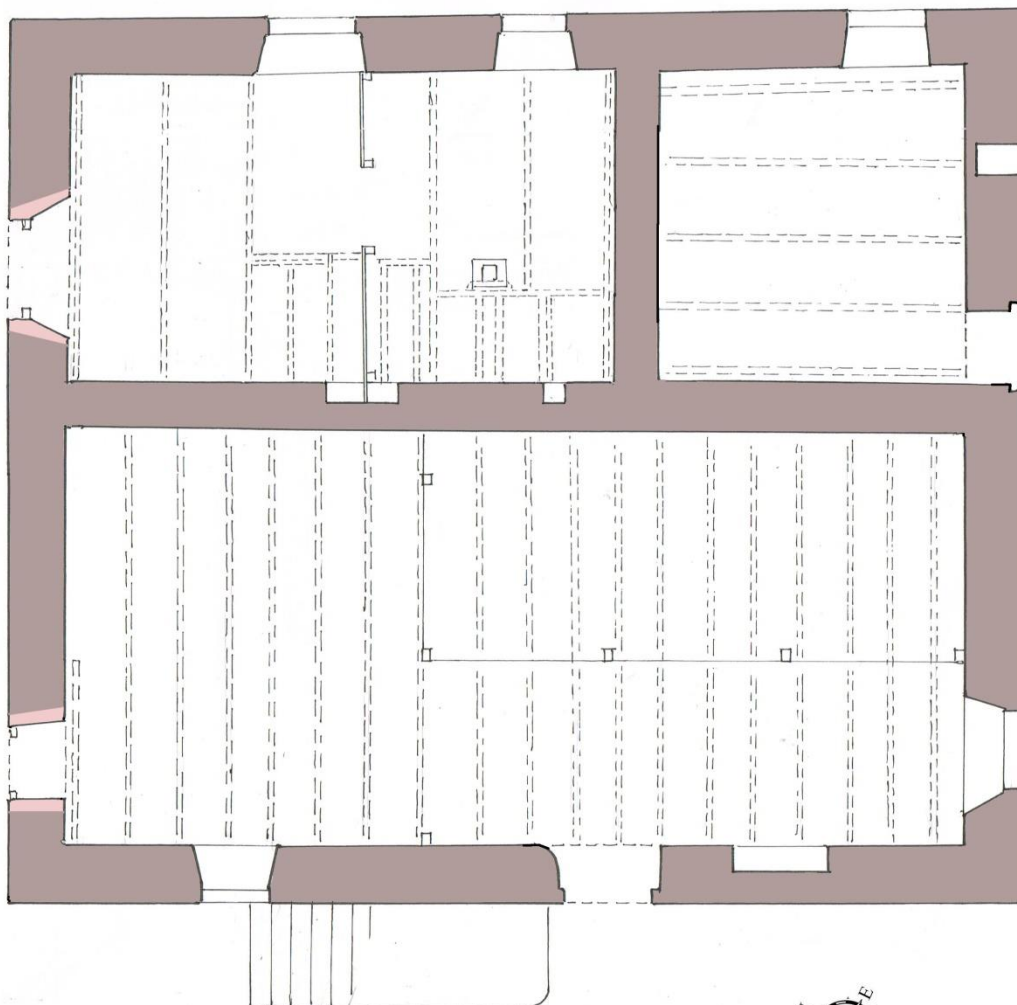
In summary, this is an attractive and interesting Victorian farmbuilding, but its value is primarily in forming part of a dramatic group in a wonderful landscape setting, rather than in any particular feature of its own. In its overall form and major features it is a relatively unaltered traditional structure and totally characteristic of upland Northumberland, although there have of course been many changes, especially to the interior, as one would expect with continued agricultural use over the best part of two centuries.

Peter F Ryder May 2019

³ A common combination, sometimes termed a 'poultiggery'

SEWINGSHIELDS Farmbuilding on east of yard

GROUND PLAN

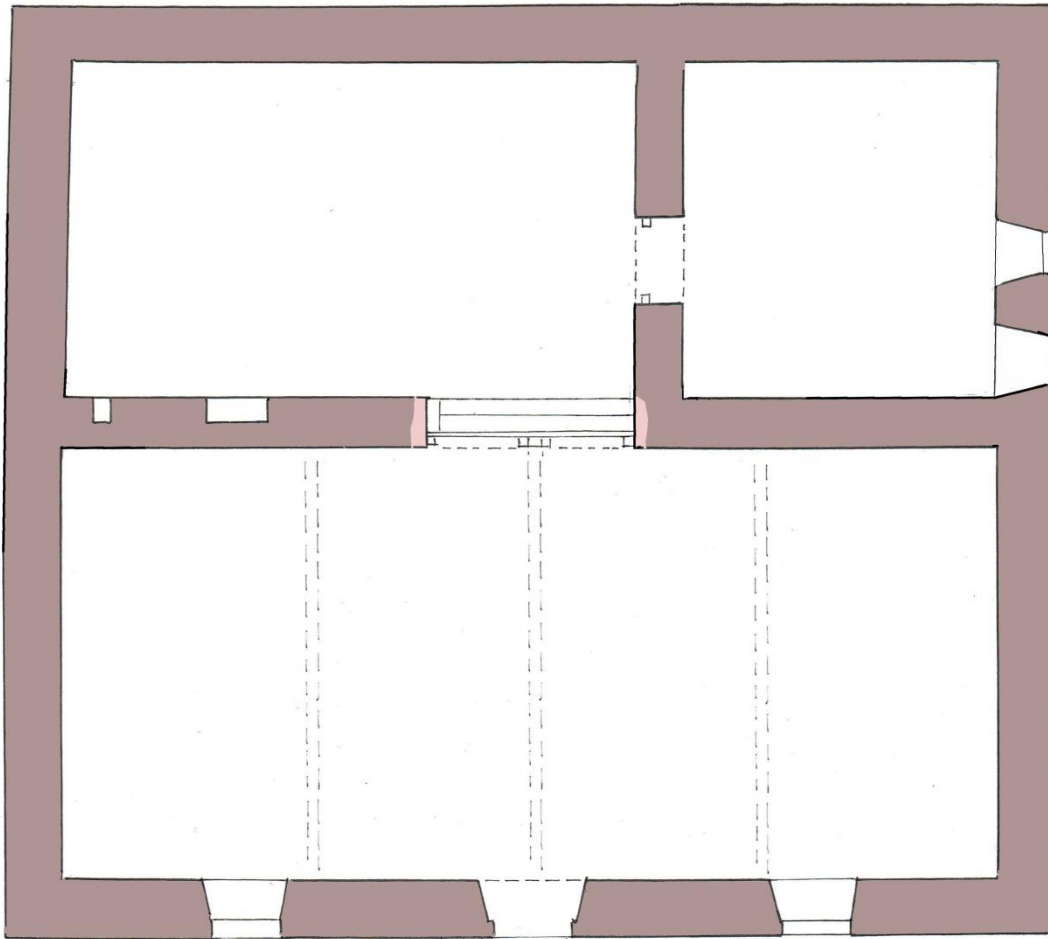


Survey P F Ryder May 2019

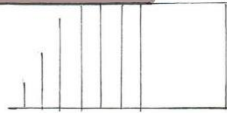


0 3 metres



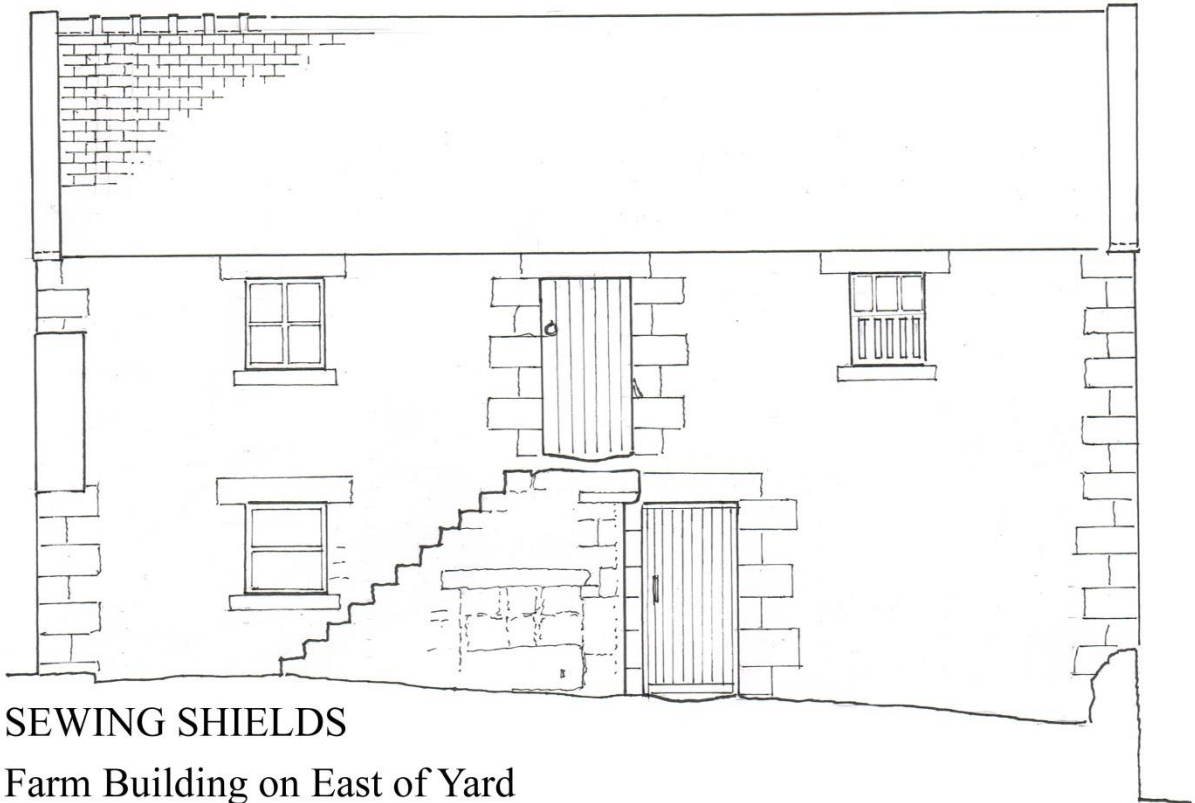


FIRST FLOOR PLAN



0 3 metres





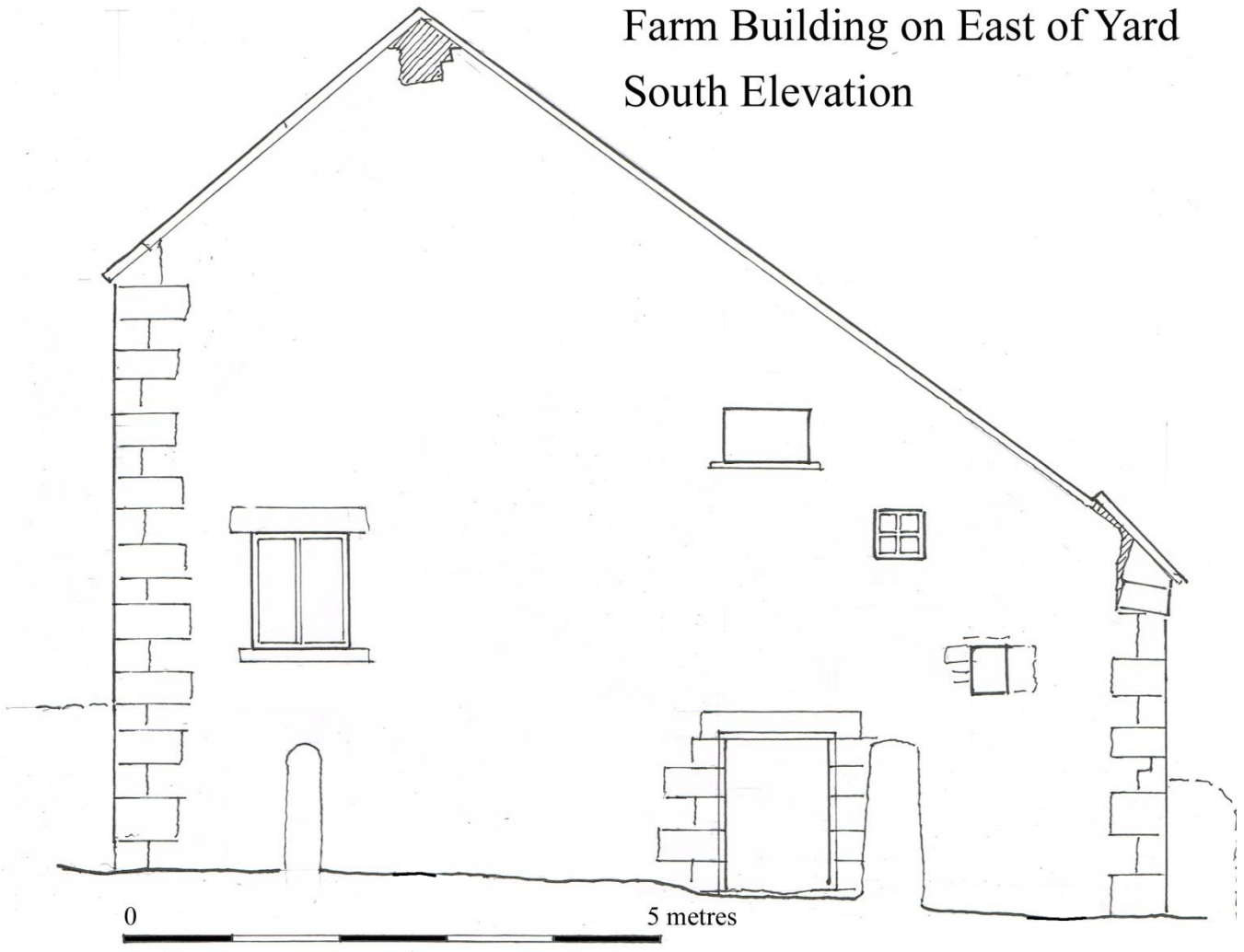
SEWING SHIELDS
Farm Building on East of Yard
West Elevation

0 5 metres

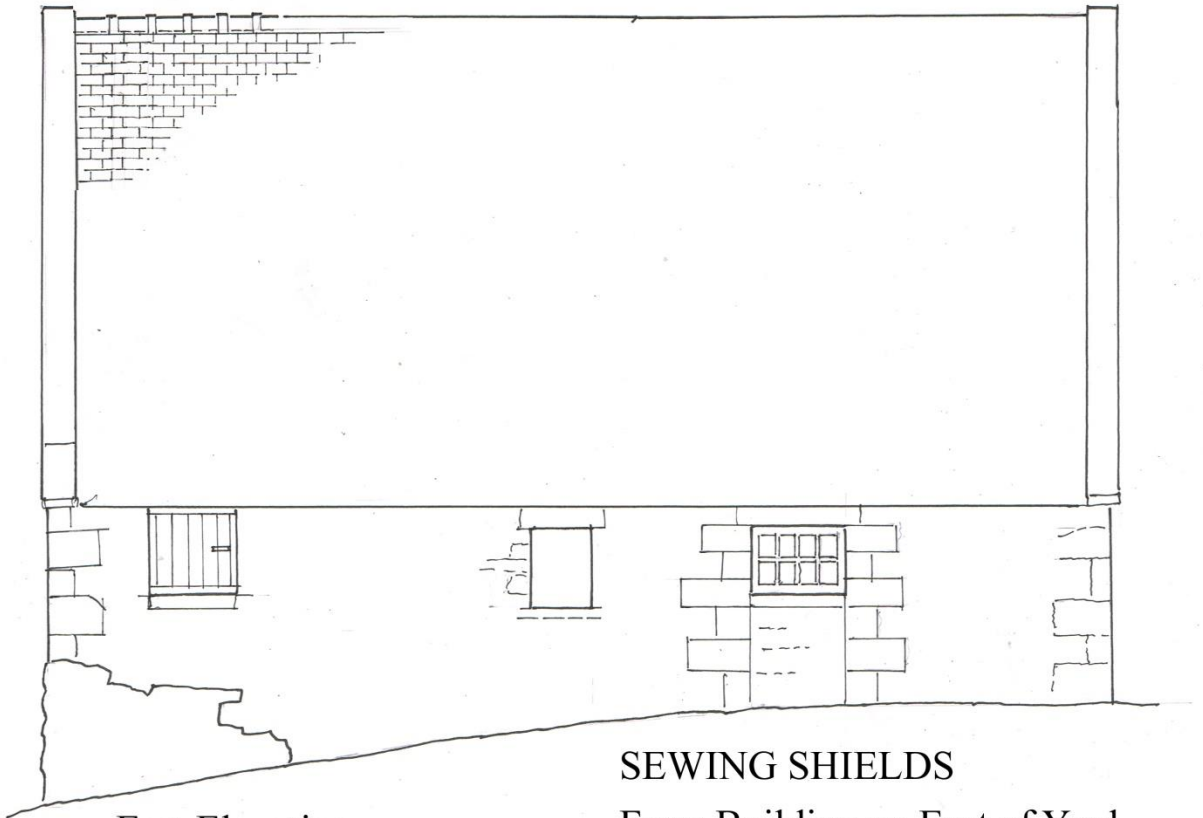
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SEWING SHIELDS

Farm Building on East of Yard
South Elevation



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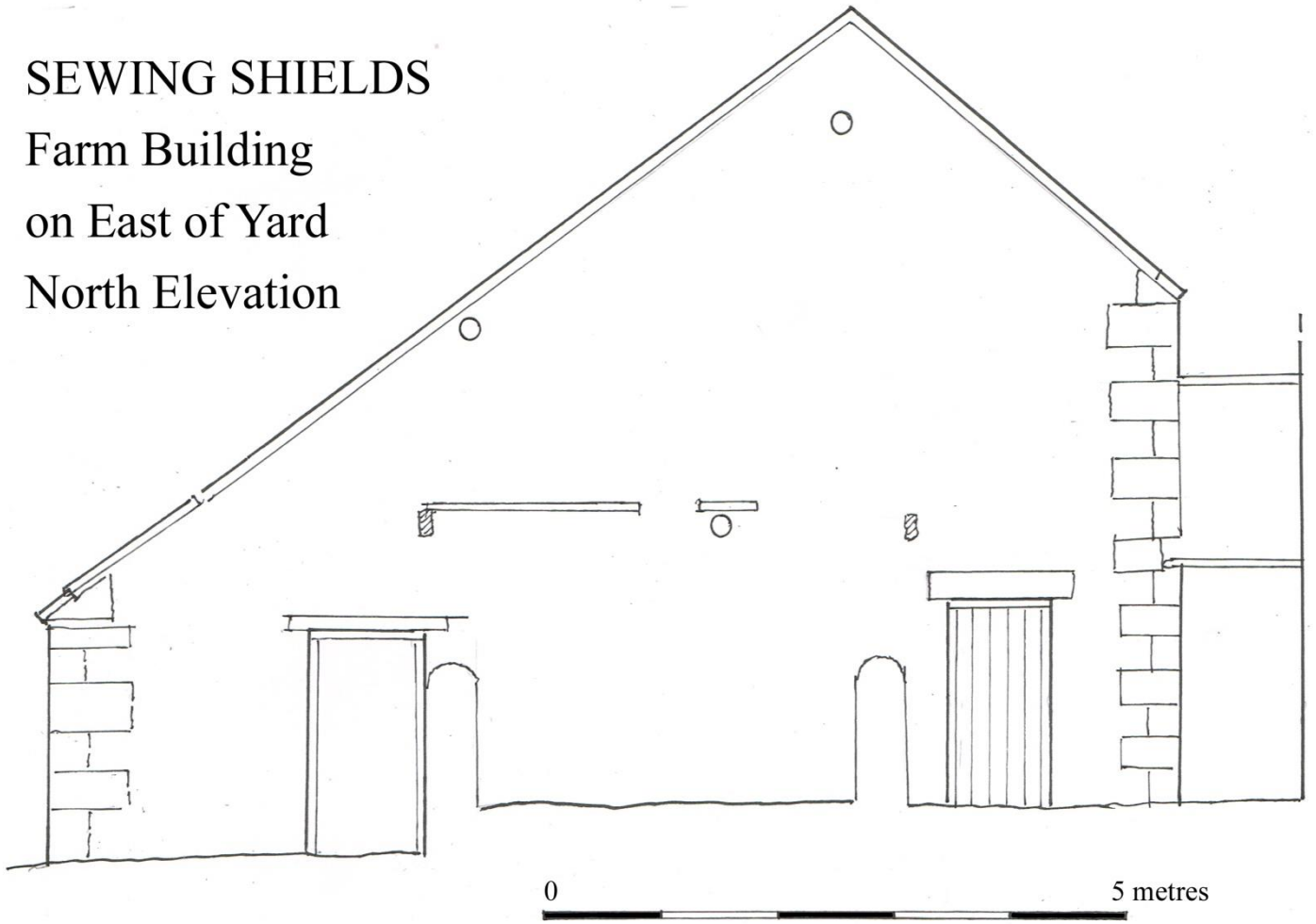
East Elevation

SEWING SHIELDS
Farm Building on East of Yard.

0  5 metres

Survey P F Ryder May 2019

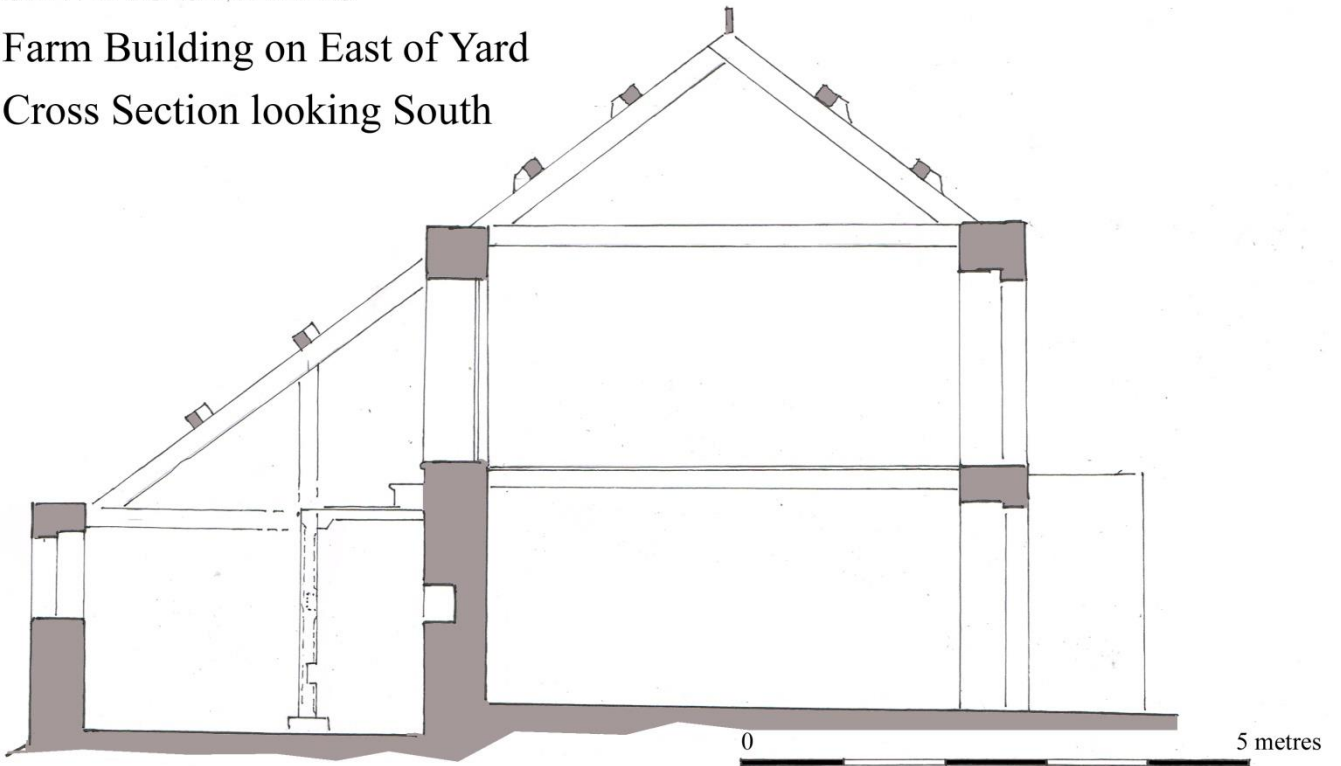
SEWING SHIELDS
Farm Building
on East of Yard
North Elevation



SEWING SHIELDS

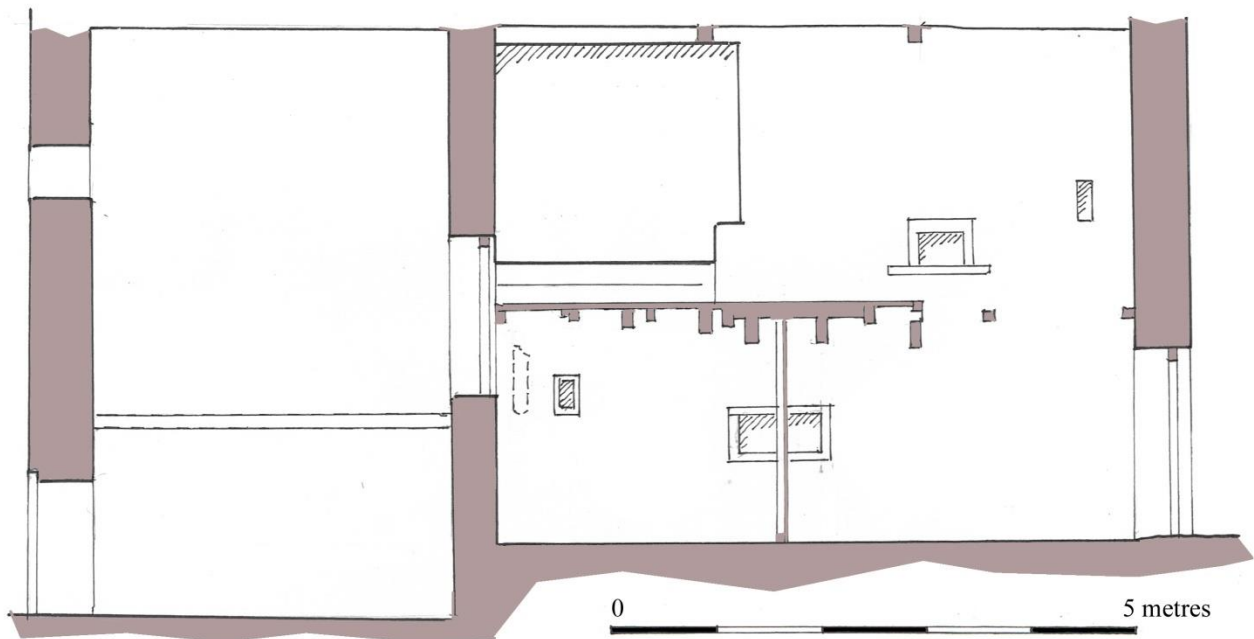
Farm Building on East of Yard

Cross Section looking South



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SEWING SHIELDS Farm Building on East of Yard Longitudinal Section through Outshut looking West



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