

Ardnamurchan History & Heritage Association

526693 Branault Cottages



Four cottars' dwellings lie along the top of the hill that slopes down to the Achateny Water to the west of Branault township. They stand in a line which runs from NW to SE, and are numbered 1 – 4 in that direction.

HISTORY:

Although the cottages are today worked as part of Branault croft, they lie on Achateny land and were originally built to house workers on Achateny Farm after Achateny clachan was cleared and the farm was developed for running sheep.



The cottages are not marked on Bald's map of 1806 but three of them, the ones which today are still visible, are present on the OS First Edition of 1856.

If Achateny clachan was cleared some time in the mid-1800s, around the same time as the Swordles, then it seems likely that the cottars were first employed by the new Achateny Farm and given plots on which to build.

The following information has been provided by Hughie and Bridget Cameron of Branault Croft, with our thanks:

Cottage 1. John and Kenneth MacPherson. Brothers, John the older. Both were farm labourers at Achateny Farm. John worked his croft, trapped rabbits for the Estate, hence called 'John the Trapper'. Kenneth worked the land at the back of Braeriach, kept sheep on the Branault common grazings, and worked for John MacPherson at Branault Post Office.



Cottage 2. Margaret MacKinnon, known as ‘Peggy Beag’, a spinster. Her parents had the house before her, and she was part of a big family – 3 brothers and 2/3 sisters. One brother, John MacKinnon, lived below the cliff at Port Kilchoan, between Achateny and Fascadale. He married and brought up children there, the house being kept very neat. Flora, one of the sisters, dyed her hair black, and lived and worked in Glasgow. She came home each year for the two weeks of the Glasgow Fair, but she travelled with all her possessions in ~10 leather suitcases, which were brought up from the slipway by John Cameron, ferryman. Hughie Cameron helped carry the cases from the cart, and ran errands for Peggy.



Cottage 3. John MacPherson & Mary Livingstone, brother and sister. John was a crofter and fisherman, collected wilks, and worked at Swordle and Achateny Farms, this despite the fact that he was severely crippled and could hardly bend – yet he worked a scythe.

Mary went away and married, but returned with a small daughter, Margaret, when her husband died. Mary left in some time between 1970 and 71 to go into sheltered housing in Strontian. Their house was beautifully kept, John being very handy, for example with thatching.



Cottage 4. Angus Cameron. Worked on the Estate and on local farms. He was also a crofter and fisherman.

All four were cottars' cottages. Cottars were given a plot of about one acre by the farm owner on which to build a house and work some land. In return, the cottar gave the farmer a number of days' seasonal work each year. This included planting and lifting potatoes, sowing and harvesting corn, hoeing turnips, haymaking. However, they had no right to the land, and could not buy it (as a crofter could) or pass it to another person. In fact, many of the families were in these houses for at least two generations.

DESCRIPTIONS:

Cottage 1 NM5267669358 (3m) 33m OD

9m x 5m, exterior walls with rounded corners, square on inside

Entrance to SW with windows on either side. Later entrance or alcove formed in opposite wall, with small window. Front windows narrower on inside, taper upwards; window to left of entrance has sill sloping outwards.

Exterior harled, with some signs of mortaring.

Roof supported by four cruck couples; slots on either side of door retain original wood. Some evidence that a later roof which did not use crucks. Local report that this building had a corrugated iron roof.

Interior division appears to be a double wall.

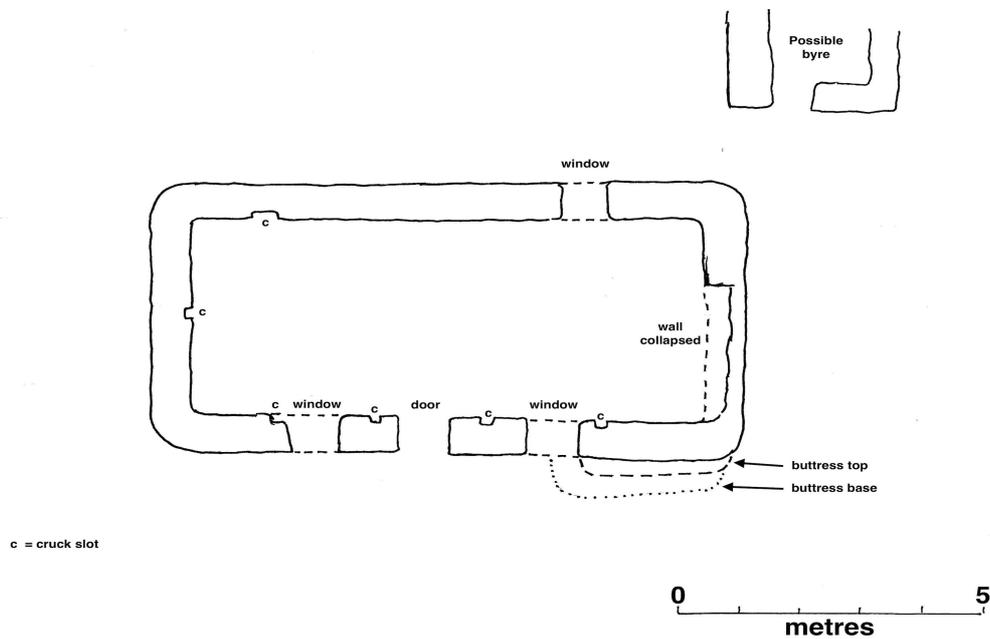
Cottage 2 NM5271569333 (3m) 35m OD

9.5m x 5m, exterior walls with rounded corners, interior corners square

Less well built than 1 and 3, thicker walls, larger stones.

Front wall buttressed along S end of front wall. Rear wall largely collapsed.

Entrance to SW with windows on either side. No rear entrance.
 Cruck couple slots visible but evidence that slots were later infilled.
 Interior division with well preserved cast iron cooking stove



Cottage 3 NM5275969297 (3m) 38m OD

9m x 4.5m, exterior walls with rounded corners, interior squared
 Walls in good condition.

No slots visible for cruck couples.

Outer walls harled but no mortar.

Central pillar with cast iron stove to SE

Cottage is reported as having been thatched until abandoned by Mrs Livingston in 1972.

Cottage 4 - Most of this cottage has been lost, the site having been used to store farm machinery.