
8 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS, Stuart Mitchell & Sue Anderson

The combined archaeological and historical approach to the questions raised by the study of Jack's Houses has proven useful in providing an insight into the types of people who lived in the structures which were excavated here, and this approach may be applicable to future investigations where both physical remains and documentary records co-exist. The two disciplines in tandem have provided a more holistic picture than may be gained from either method alone.

Apart from a single sherd of medieval pottery found in the evaluation, there was no evidence for activity on or near the site prior to the 19th century. It is likely that the land was in agricultural use before Jack's Houses were built.

The archaeological and historical investigations confirm that Jack's Houses were probably built between around 1838 and 1841, most likely in 1839. The remains of the structure appear to conform with its depiction on the first and second edition OS maps (1855, 1897). In its initial phase it was a curvilinear building located on the north side of the road leading from Almondhill to Humble Farm, as depicted on the early maps. An associated triangular allotment or field lay to the north. The ditch forming the eastern boundary of this field, and the draw well it contained, also appear on the first edition map and were probably contemporary with Jack's Houses. The ditch running eastwards from the structure's south-eastern corner is probably of slightly earlier or contemporary date. Field boundary walls and an entrance gateway were added, probably during Jack's Houses' period of occupation. Field drainage appears to have been introduced or, more likely, improved from the 1840s onwards with the installation of clay pipe drains (Douglas and Oglethorpe 1993). The upgrading of the Humble Farm road, since partially built over by the A8000–M8 slip road, has slightly encroached on some of the remains including the extreme south-west edge of Jack's Houses and the midden.

The walls of the structure varied in preservation from the low sandstone footings of the southern wall to truncated foundation trenches on the other sides. These indicate that internally the eastern half of the building was 9.5m long and 5m wide. There was no evidence of internal partitions in the dirt floor, but presumably they existed if the cottages were to contain a separate kitchen, 'room', lobby and pantry as suggested by the records. Much of the interior of Jack's Houses had been destroyed by a modern water pipe trench, but two pits and a slot were discovered within the building and, although no stratigraphic links were present, it seems likely that these features were contemporary with the

original occupation of Jack's Houses. The ash-filled slot close to the west end of the east structure could indicate the presence of a hearth close to the wall here. An annexe to the western end of Jack's Houses is shown on the first edition OS map, but no trace of the feature had survived. A brick outhouse which does not appear on any maps appears to have been a later addition.

The western end of the building was very poorly preserved, with only approximately 7m of the front wall surviving. If this was the original full extent, it seems likely that this was the one-roomed/windowed dwelling referred to in the records. Possible evidence for a threshold can be discerned, but otherwise there is little evidence with which to interpret the structure.

Although both the structures had stone foundations, it is possible that they were not entirely stone-built, as some of these structures were built of turf and clay on a stone foundation. This might explain why they were in need of repair within ten years of their apparent construction date.

The draw well appears to have gone out of use during the early 20th century, as it does not appear on the 2nd edition map. The fill of the well contained several 20th-century artefacts, which are associable with the post-use phase of the well, during infilling or accumulation of the fill.

The midden on the south side of the Humble Farm road opposite Jack's Houses accumulated over a short period relative to its size during the occupancy of Jack's Houses, and although it seems certain that the inhabitants of Jack's Houses would have contributed their own domestic refuse to the midden, its bulk has been shown to be of external origin, although the derivation of the material is uncertain. There is documentary evidence of street hawkers and scavengers collecting and sorting pottery and other waste in 19th-century London (Mayhew 1861) and other urban centres, and it is likely that similar practices were carried out in Edinburgh, with the removal of waste to nearby farmland. The midden may simply represent a discrete dump, although the large concentrations of ceramic material may indicate that it was imported to be used to break up clay subsoils.

The physical remains excavated at Jack's Houses have provided us with some insight into the cramped and probably unsanitary conditions in which relatively large families were expected to reside. Other than indicating that the houses had one or two windowed rooms, this kind of information is not found in the records relating to these cottages. The lack of any evidence for internal walling within the floor plan as excavated suggests

that any division into rooms, suggested by the records for nearby cottages, was ephemeral and probably offered the occupants little in the way of privacy or storage space. The absence of any material culture beyond the most basic items such as tools and crockery directly associated with the building suggests that in any case these people probably had few possessions to clutter the meagre space they had been allotted. The houses seem to have been heated at least, as evidence of hearths

was found, but a privy building appears to have been a later addition. An annexe shown to exist on map evidence was apparently so vestigial that it was not identified archaeologically. In combination, the evidence suggests houses which were cheaply built, poorly maintained and overcrowded throughout much of their existence, occupied by transient families working as agricultural labourers and living in conditions which may not have been significantly better than those of their urban peers.