

3 BACKGROUND

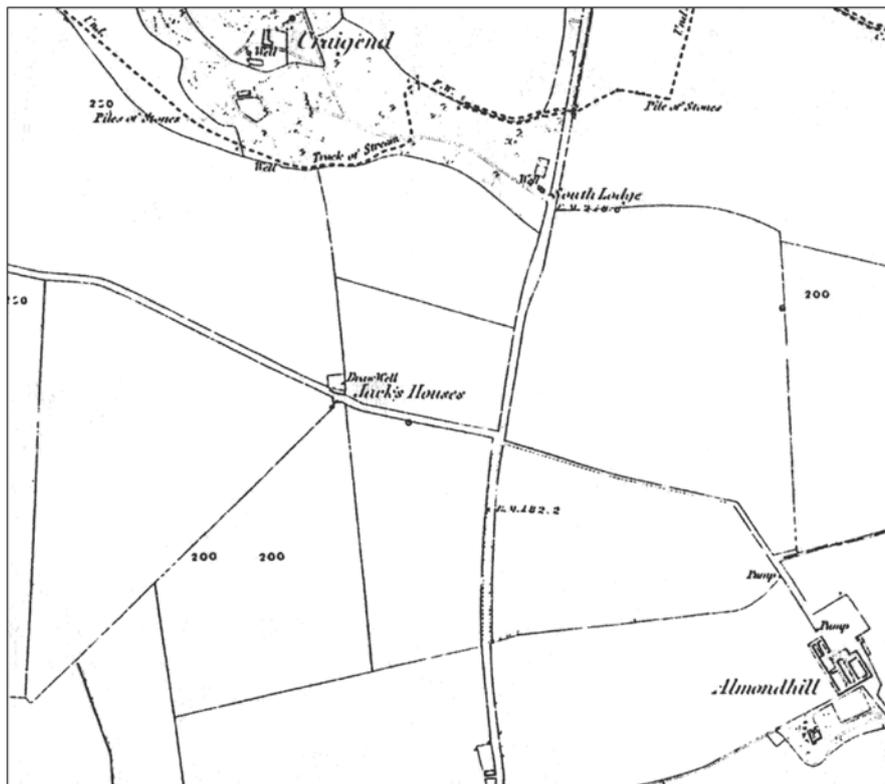
The remains of Jack's Houses were situated in a field of rough pasture in the angle formed by the B800 and the existing M9 Spur road, and lay alongside an old tarmac road which formerly linked Humbie Farm with Almondhill Farm, now separated by the M9 Spur. The drift geology of the area is a mixture of firm or compact clays and silts, with occasional stones, mostly rounded volcanic boulders. Topsoil was c 0.3m deep, overlying a subsoil 0.1m thick, with natural stiff grey clay at the base. The area of the site was relatively level and lay at c 68m above OD. Due to the clay subsoil, the area is very poorly drained and prone to waterlogging and flooding. An extensive field drainage system comprising both rubble drains and clay cylinder drains was present – necessary for this type of land to be agriculturally useful.

Jack's Houses were part of the Humbie Farm complex, which lay in the parish of Kirkliston. The cottages are recorded on the 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey coverage (1855 and 1897 respectively) and appear in the 1841 census; estate records suggest that they were erected in the 1830s, although they do not appear on the 1832 edition of John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland*, which depicts Humbie Farm and the track which runs past Jack's

Houses. At that time the landowner was the Earl of Hopetoun/Marquis of Linlithgow, and the farm was tenanted by George and Robert Dudgeon, descendants of whom held the tenancy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries; the Dudgeon family continue to farm at the time of writing (see below, 'Documentary Evidence').

The earliest known inhabitants, listed in the 1841 census, were, in one cottage, John Baxter, blacksmith, his wife Agnes and their seven children, and in the other, George Sharp, wright, his wife Ellen and their four children. One dwelling is described in the 1841 census as having one windowed room and the other as possessing two windowed rooms. Both buildings were listed in the 1901 census as being empty and 'out of repair', but repairs must have been carried out as the Valuation Roll records occupants shortly thereafter. Therefore, apart from occasional vacancies, the cottages were more or less continuously inhabited until being condemned in the 1930s, the last recorded occupant being Dennis Wood, a labourer. They are all depicted as upstanding buildings on the 1928 'popular' edition of the Ordnance Survey map.

The 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey coverage (illus 2 and 3) shows Jack's Houses as a narrow,



Illus 2 The 1st Edition OS map (extract)

slightly curving row of cottages almost on the road verge, with a small enclosed area to their north. A draw well is shown within the enclosed area on the 1st edition map (illus 2).

An archaeological evaluation conducted in December 2002 (Mitchell & Suddaby 2003) confirmed that the footings of the cottages survived in association with ditches and drystone dykes, which formed two phases of field boundaries. A large dump of 19th-century potsherds was discovered close to the

cottages and traces of rig and furrow cultivation survived in the surrounding fields. The recovery of a sherd of unglazed medieval pottery from one of the furrows may indicate that the area had been cultivated in the medieval era.

While Jack's Houses were small, modest buildings, their history is not insignificant. The story of these labourers' dwellings and their occupants has much to contribute to the social history of rural life in lowland Scotland.



Illus 3 The 2nd Edition OS map (extract)