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# An early-nineteenth-century racecourse stand at Uthrogle, near Cupar, Fife

**Paula Martin**

Here stands a shed to fend the show'rs  
An' screen our countra gentry;

(Robert Burns, *The Holy Fair*)

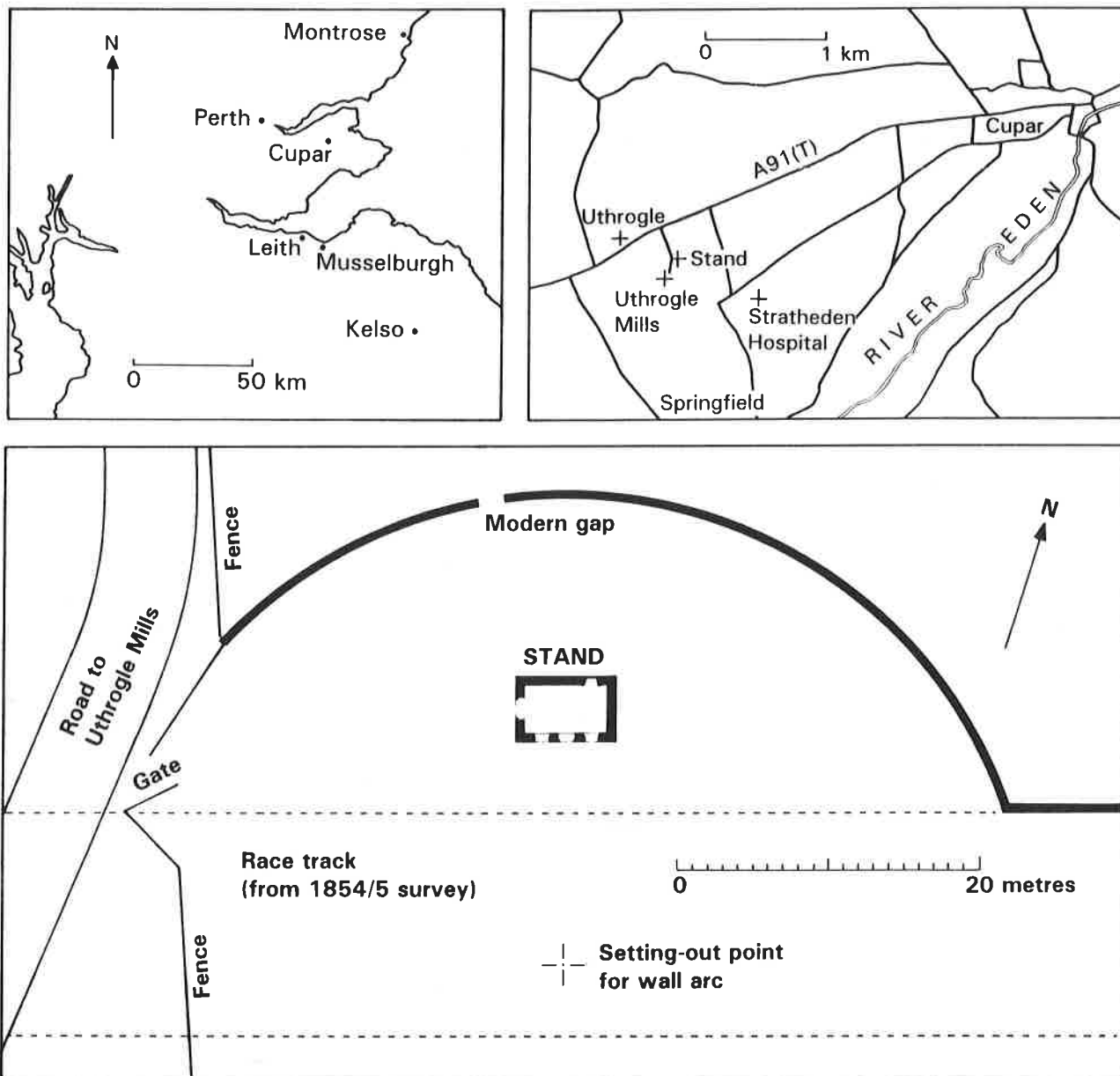
Horse racing is recorded on the sands at Leith from the beginning of the 16th century, and at Dumfries by 1575. During the 17th century races were also held at Banff, Cupar, Dumfries, Dunfermline, Glasgow, Haddington, Jedburgh, Lanark, Leith, Paisley, Peebles, Perth and Stirling (Burnett 1995, 11; Fittis 1891, 109–21). In his diary John Lamont recorded details of some of the races at Cupar, which were an annual event, first held in 1621. There were two races, on consecutive days, with prizes of silver cups or a saddle. The winning horses mentioned by Lamont belonged to landowners from Fife, Angus and Selkirkshire (Lamont 1810, 115, 135–6, 145, 160–1, 187–8, 204, 209, 213). The tradition continued into the 18th century, with the town council providing a silver cup or plate each year of about 50 ounces, bought from Edinburgh (StAU B13/14/2, 22 Mar 1701, 4 Feb 1706; B13/14/3, 22 Mar 1724).

In February 1741 the town council changed the date of the races from April to October because of damage to crops, and because with parliament now in London many landowners were absent in April. The following year written rules were established. Horses racing on the first day had to be worth £15 sterling each, and the prize was to be 15 guineas in money rather than silver plate. The prize for the second race was 5 guineas. There had to be at least three horses competing in the first race (StAU B13/13/4, 23 Aug 1742, 29 Aug 1750). Without good horses the crowds would not turn up and spend money. There were disputes in the town council during the 1750s as to whether the town should continue to provide prizes, as attendances were declining and therefore 'the Town's folk in general reaped very little or no advantage'. Some time after 1763 the race meeting seems to have been abandoned (StAU B13/14/4, 14 Aug 1752; B13/14/5, 20 Aug 1755, 2 July 1760; 19 Aug 1763).

Soon afterwards, however, racing was revived by new organisations. The Caledonian Hunt was established in 1777, soon followed by the Fife Hunt (1780) and the Perth Hunt (1784) (Fittis 1891, 124). The purpose of the Fife Hunt was to organise racing (as opposed to the Fife Foxhounds, a separate but overlapping organisation established in 1805, whose purpose was hunting) (Babington 1883, 13–16). In 1800 the Fife Hunt revived the annual race meeting at Cupar, and the town council again contributed money for a prize (B13/14/7, 9 Sept 1800, 10 Sept 1801, 24 Sept 1802, 18 Sept 1810). Racing was also started or re-started in other places at around this date.

The first record of Perth races is in 1613. For many years they were run on the South Inch, but in the late 18th century a course was laid out on the North Inch, incorporating extra land given by the earl of Kinnoull (Fairfax-Blakeborough 1956, 89–93). This course is shown on MacFarlane's map of 1792, Wood's town plan of 1823, and the first edition of the 1:10,560 Ordnance Survey map of 1860. Fairfax-Blakeborough (1956, 93) states that a grandstand was built opposite the winning post, but other sources say that the grandstand was a temporary construction set up each race week (Fothergill nd, 16–17). Montrose races were started in 1795, and a course laid out on the East Links, with a grandstand (Low 1994, 76–7). This course can be seen on Wood's town plan of 1822, though there is no obvious stand marked, but it is not shown on the OS 1:10,560 map of 1861. In 1816 racing was transferred from Leith sands to a new course at Musselburgh (Burnett 1995, 31–2; Fittis 1891, 110). In 1821 the duke of Roxburghe laid out a new course at Berry Moss, just outside Kelso, and the following year built an 'elegant' grandstand modelled on that at Doncaster. It had an arcaded ground floor. Half the first floor was enclosed, and half was roofed but open on three sides. On top of the solid part of the first floor was a higher but unroofed viewing platform. This stand, much altered, is still in use (NLS Acc9399/10; Fairfax-Blakeborough nd; McConnell 1988, 25).

The Fife Hunt was originally limited to 25



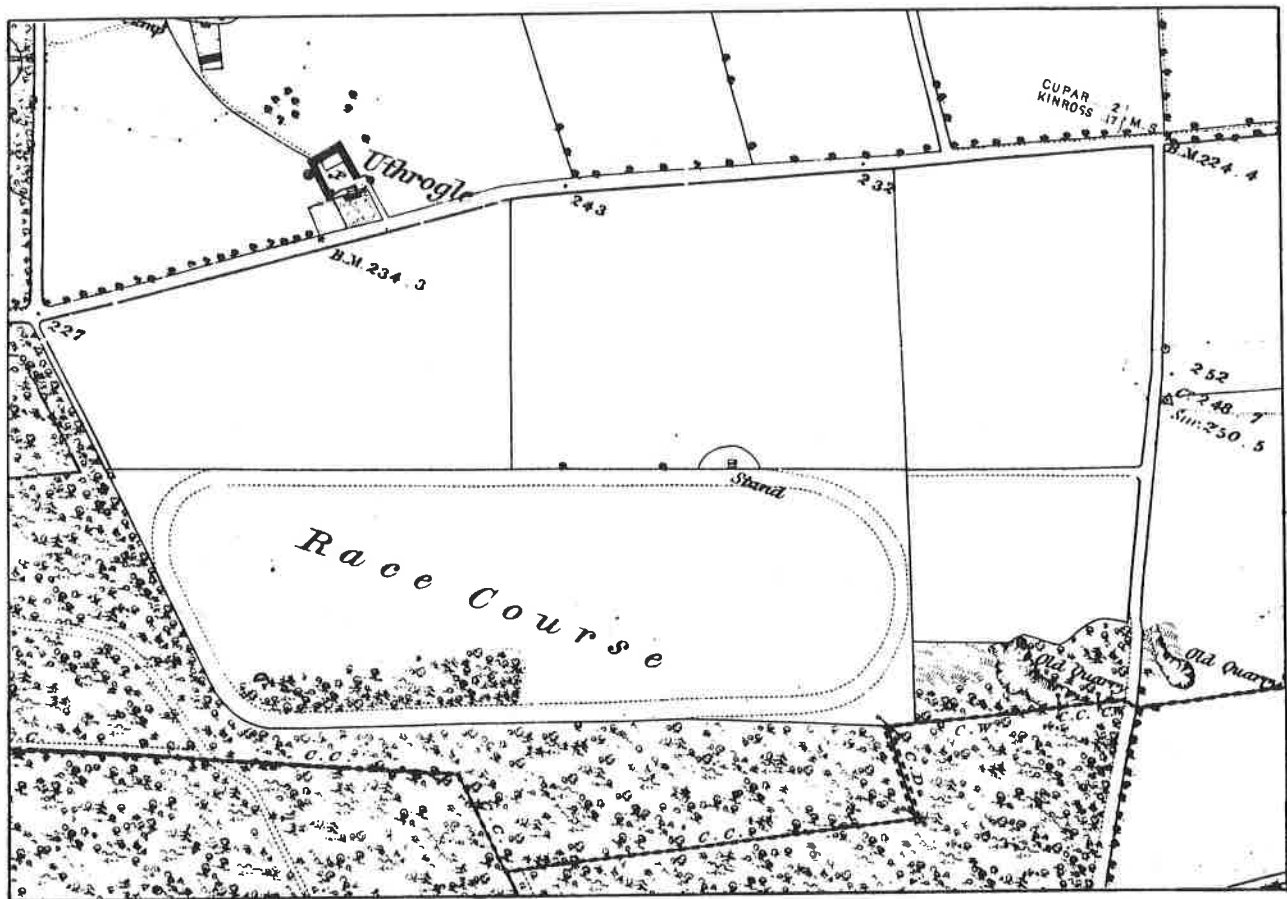
Illus 1. General location map, and plan of stand and surviving surrounding wall (surveyed and drawn by Colin Martin).

members, but the limit was soon changed to 100. Membership lists survive for 1793 and 1801, both showing over 90 members, each paying an annual subscription of four guineas (NAS GD20/sec1/891; NLS 3.2826; Babington 1883, 16). Members had to be landowners ('heritors') or their sons. At dinners they were to wear 'a uniform consisting of a dark green Common double breasted evening Coat, with plain Collar, and skirts lined with White silk - with a plated metal button having 'Fife Hunt' in the centre and the thistle around the edge' (Minute Book).

The revived race week once again boosted the economy of Cupar. As well as the two horse races there were other activities throughout the week, including a hunt ball for the social elite, and, for the general populace, pig-wrestling and sack races

at the Fluthers (Martin 1994, 34-5). In England race meetings, particularly in county towns, involved a 'sophisticated social infrastructure. Much of this focused upon the provision of food and refreshments, which could give rise to some bumper feasts or "ordinaries"' (Borsay 1989, 190). And according to Henrietta Keddie, in Cupar:

These horse-races were largely attended, not to say by the nobility and gentry of the county, but by magnates from all parts of the country ... There was an 'ordinary' for meals in the principal hotel, where visitors, if they chose, could dine and sup together. There was a succession of balls in the handsome County hall, for the benefit of the ladies who accompanied the gentlemen on



*Illus 2. Detail from OS 1:10,560 map, Fife sheet 10, surveyed 1854, printed 1855, with imposed metric scale.*

these occasions. But as to furnishing superior sleeping accommodation for the week, neither the best nor the worst inns had resources to meet the urgent requirements. Such lodgings as were to be had in the town were equally inadequate. There was nothing for it save that the professional residents should lay aside their privacy and let the main part of their houses for the week. During the interval the men and women crammed themselves into holes and corners. For their obliging temper in subjecting themselves to this inconvenience, the tenants of the houses secured the patronage of the mighty among their countrymen and a handsome enough *douceur*, which was left to the generosity of the donors (Keddie 1911, 98–9).

It is clear from witness statements in various court cases that race week in Cupar was a time for those working away from home to return and visit old friends, and for locals to drink more than normal.

Traditionally Cupar races had been run over whatever fields were available, but when they

were revived it was felt that a proper racecourse was needed. Racing everywhere was becoming more organised. In 1811 a course was laid out by the Fife Hunt at Uthrogle, about 4 km west of Cupar, on land owned by the earl of Leven and Melville (Illus 1). The track runs around a field known as 'Southfield of Uthrogle', to the south of the A91, almost opposite Uthrogle Farm (Illus 2) (NAS GD26/12/33). The original access road at the north-west corner of the track, now disused, is shown on a map of 1832 (Miller), and can still be traced at NO 335 133 at the eastern edge of a wood. In 1828 a new access road was constructed from the east. Both roads can be seen on the 1854 OS map (Illus 2). The site is now accessible from the road leading to Uthrogle Mills (Scotts Porage Oats), which are built on part of the field on which the course was laid out.

The hunt was granted a 19-year lease for the use of this field for one week a year, provided they enclosed it and its access road with a stone wall 4 feet (1.17 m) high (NAS GD26/12/23). In 1823 they leased another piece of ground immediately to the north 'to erect a Race Stand of Stone and Lime, with slate Roof' and 'a space for a Road for Carriages round the same' (letter from earl of



*Illus 3. The stand photographed in 1999 (photo: Colin Martin).*

Leven and Melville, 5 May 1823, in back of Minute Book). The semicircular alteration to the field boundary, created when this extra piece of land was added to the field, is clearly shown on maps from 1832 to the present, and can still be seen on the ground. This segment of wall is 5 feet (1.5 m) high.

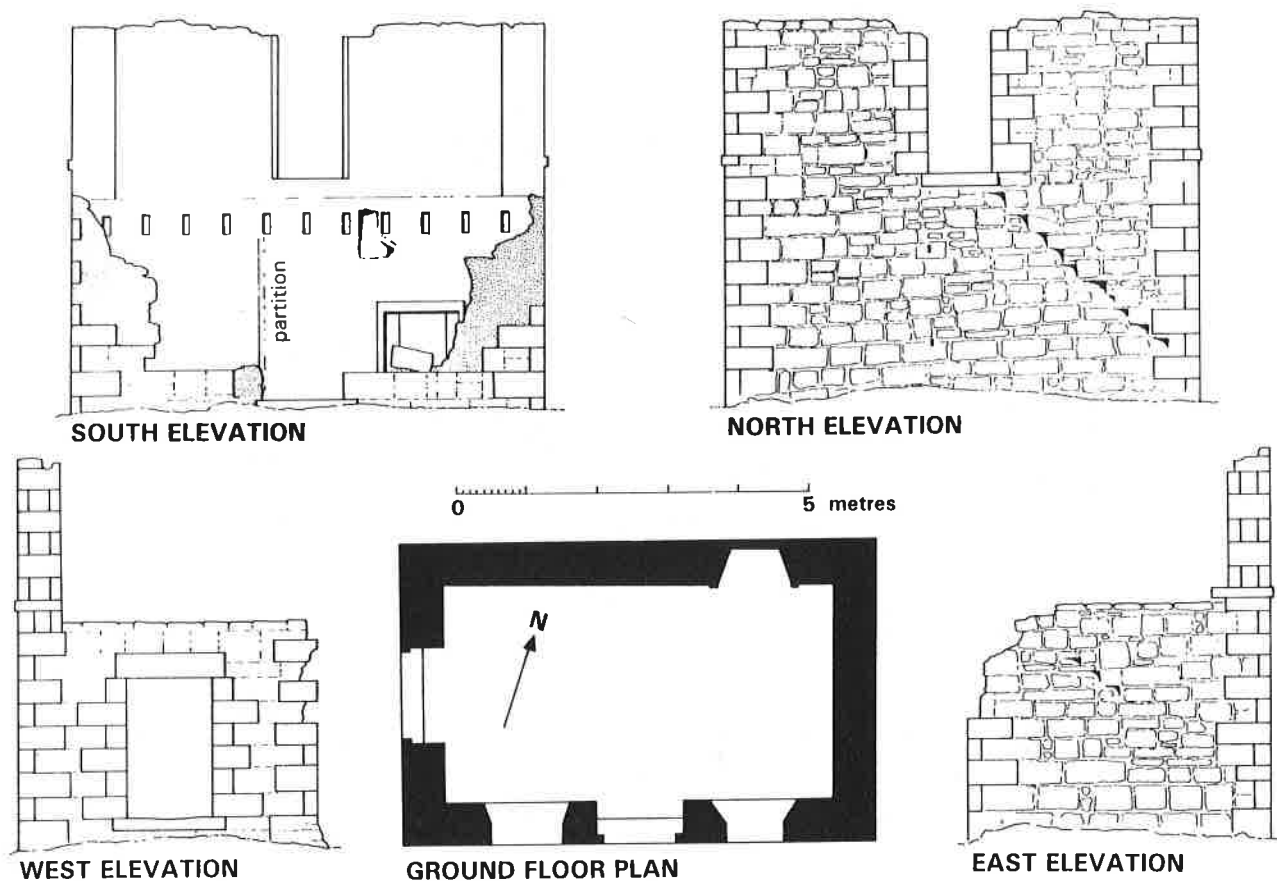
Expenses recorded in relation to the races include payments for advertising, for musicians, and to the militia for keeping order, as well as maintenance of the course and prize money. In 1832 when the Caledonian Hunt came to Cupar, it was decided to charge 2s 6d for access to the stand. This yielded £25 15s (ie 206 people), although the cost of collecting the tickets was £2 12s, plus 8s 6d 'for two tin Boxes for holding Stand Tickets' (Minute Book).

By 1836 attendances at races were declining, and the Hunt Ball made a loss. Although another visit by the Caledonian Hunt in 1839 temporarily improved attendances, there was a steady decline both in membership of the hunt and in numbers attending race meetings. The last race was held at Uthrogle on 29 September 1841. Repairs continued to be carried out to both stand and course, and in

1854 the hunt chose to renew its lease on the land, and even continued to pay insurance premiums for the stand (Minute Book). Racing was later revived by the Fife Foxhounds at various farms including Bruntshiels and Greigston, and the annual point-to-point meeting is currently held at Balcormo (Courier 1993; Martin 1994, 35). The hunt continues to hold each year a ball, a luncheon, and a visit to Musselburgh races, where the club provides a trophy (pers comm, Secretary, Fife Hunt).

### Description of the remains

The Uthrogle stand survives in a semi-ruinous condition at NO 3421 1332 (Illus 3). The building is rectangular, with long and short quoins, the west and south walls of dressed ashlar construction, the north and east walls of coursed rubble (Illus 4). The walls are approximately 600 mm (2 feet) thick, and the internal dimensions of the ground floor room are 5.5 m x 3 m. Its external features are, in the west wall, a central doorway; on the south wall, a central doorway flanked by windows, looking out over the course; on the east wall traces of ragging for an outside stone stair; on the north



*Illus 4. Plan and elevations of stand (surveyed and drawn by Colin Martin, 1999).*

wall, much clearer ragging for an outside stone stair, leading to a central doorway on the upper floor. A pair of iron pintles set in the wall below and just to the east of the eastern edge of the door suggest a door to the space under the stairs. Almost all the accessible dressed stone such as stairs and lintels has been robbed. The greatest loss has been from the south front, which has lost the facings of the doors and windows, but there is just enough evidence remaining to reconstruct these features.

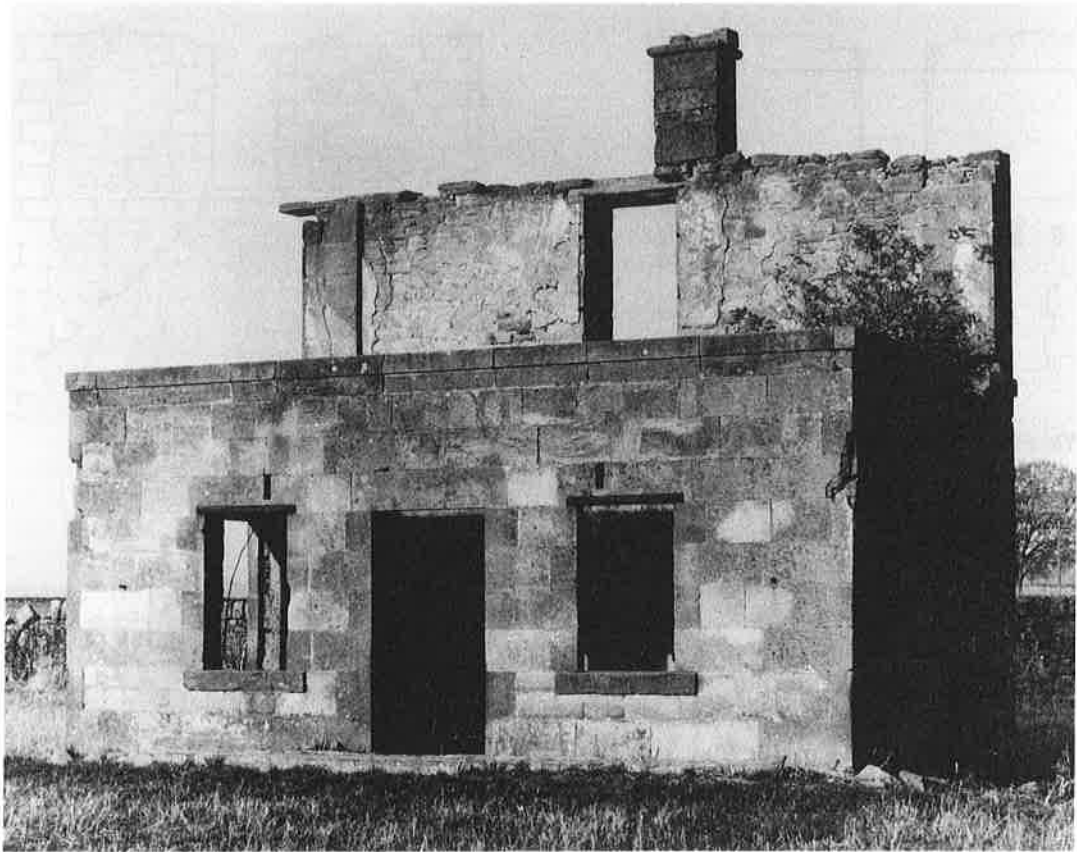
The internal features are, on the west wall, the doorway, with one metal fitting at shoulder height. On the south wall, the door and the angled window recesses. On the east wall there is evidence of a blocked fireplace and chimney. On the north wall is a fireplace near the east end, with part of its chimney flue exposed above it. There are also slots for eleven 12-inch x 3-inch (300 mm x 75 mm) ceiling joists, set at 18-inch (450 mm) intervals. Some of the walls are covered in rendering, and in this is evidence of an internal partition about one third of the way along the north wall.

These observations are supplemented by two photographs, one taken on 1 December 1964 by Captain D O Fairlie, formerly of Myres Castle, showing the building without a roof but with the south front and the rear wall including the lintel of the upper door, and the chimney (Illus 5). There

are slots in the window lintels and corresponding damage to the quoins which presumably supported a projecting roof or verandah. A fore-structure is indicated in the 1854 Ordnance Survey map (Illus 2). An earlier photograph, of unknown date, shows the building with a hipped slated roof, partially collapsed, supported by a tubular metal frame which may not be original (Illus 6).

It appears that the remains represent at least two phases of use, though it is not clear why the stair and fireplace were moved from the east to the north wall. Serious race-goers would have watched the racing from the upper platform, which was built with a slight forward slope and was therefore presumably tiered. Racing could also have been watched from seats within the fore-structure, while the ground floor room provided warmth and protection from the elements. The internal partition, which does not appear to have run right to the front of the building, may have been to screen the room from draughts from the door, or may have divided off a cloakroom or even a 'necessary' beside the door.

While the existence of this building was fairly well known locally, it was only in 1997 that the author brought it to the attention of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and Historic Scotland, and it was realised that it might be a unique survival in



*Illus 5. The stand photographed by Captain D Fairlie on 1 December 1964 (courtesy of the Fife Hunt).*



*Illus 6. Photograph of unknown date, prior to 1964, showing the hipped roof (courtesy of the Fife Hunt).*

Scotland. It has now been listed Category C(S). The farmer has recently fenced the building to protect it from further damage by grazing animals.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Rachel Peterkin and Sir James Morrison-Low for putting her in contact with D A G Reid, the present Secretary of the Fife Hunt. She is particularly grateful to Mr Reid for allowing her access to the first Minute Book, and to the two photographs (Illus 5 and 6). Mark Hall of Perth Museum showed a supportive interest in the subject and provided some useful information. And many thanks are due to Colin Martin for the survey of the building and its surroundings.

### Abbreviations

NAS	National Archives of Scotland (formerly Scottish Record Office), Edinburgh
NLS	National Library of Scotland
OS	Ordnance Survey
StAU	St Andrews University Library, Archives

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### Abstract

*The remains of the stand associated with the early 19th-century racecourse at Uthrogle, near Cupar, Fife, have been identified, its background researched and a survey and photographic record produced.*

Keywords: Uthrogle, Cupar, horse, race, course, stand