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SCOTLAND'S BUILDING CONSERVATION CENTRE

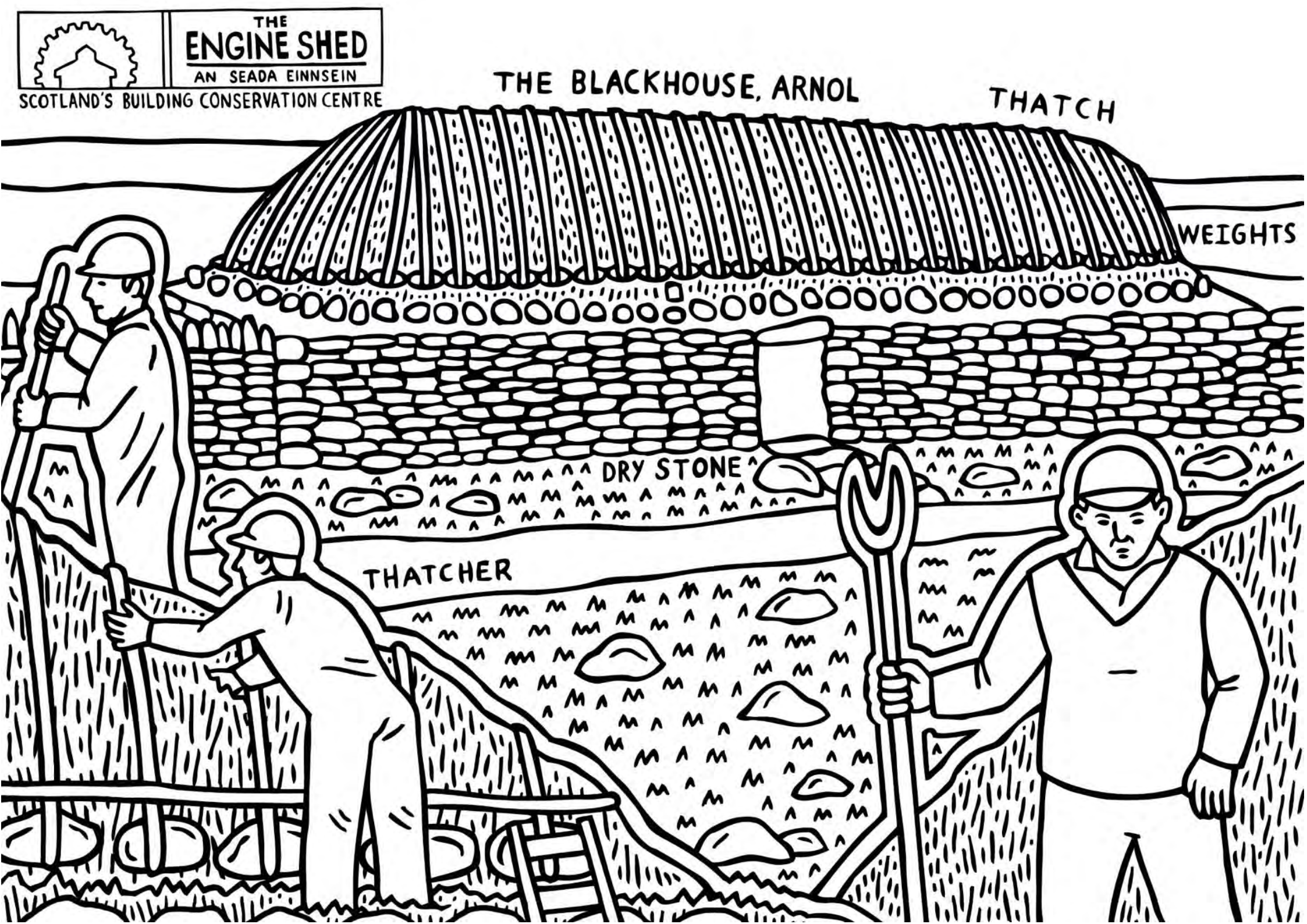
THE BLACKHOUSE, ARNOL

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THE BLACKHOUSE, ARNOL



What is a Blackhouse?

A blackhouse is a traditional type of home that was once common in the Western Isles of Scotland. They are long, narrow buildings with thick walls but without windows or chimneys. Blackhouses were a type of byre-dwelling, which means that a family lived at one end of the building in their living space and the animals lived at the other end in a byre, all under the one roof! The extra heat from the animals helped to keep the family warm in bad weather.

What were blackhouses made from?

The materials used to build a blackhouse were found locally. The walls were built from stone held together with earth mortar, and the tops of the walls were covered with clay and turf. Timber was used to build a frame for the thatched roof. As few trees grew in the Western Isles families used timbers which they found washed up on the beach.

Plants like heather, straw, and seaweed were used for thatching the roof, and the thatch was secured in place by ropes made from straw or heather. The ropes were weighed down with stones to secure them in place and as protection from strong winds. A peat fire was kept burning in the area where the family slept and cooked. The smoke would rise through the building and escape through the thatch.

Today, blackhouses are no longer used as homes and most have disappeared or fallen into ruin. You can visit the Blackhouse of Arnol on the Isle of Lewis to see one of the few remaining blackhouses in Scotland and learn about life in one of these traditional rural homes.

The Engine Shed

The Engine Shed is Scotland's dedicated building conservation centre based in Stirling, Scotland. It is run by Historic Environment Scotland, the lead public body set up to investigate, care for and protect promote Scotland's historic environment. We are passionate about our built heritage and have an extensive outreach and education programme to enthuse and engage people of all ages.

We hope you enjoy using this resource! If you have any feedback for us, please e-mail us at technicaleducation@hes.scot.