

# DONSIDE URBAN VILLAGE ABERDEEN



**- Archaeological Evaluation -  
&  
- Standing Structure Survey -  
Carried out 6<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010  
by  
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd**



**Report No: MAS 2010 - 10**  
by  
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**DONSID VILLAGE**  
**ABERDEEN**  
**-Archaeological Evaluation and**  
**Standing Building Recording-**

**H K & J C MURRAY**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Proposals for the development of an urban village on the site of the former Donside paper mills required that an archaeological evaluation should be carried out on two areas not previously fully evaluated. A standing building survey of Donside Cottage and recording of its garden was also required.
- 1.3 The archaeological condition was applied in the context of PAN 42 para 35 and SPP 23 which states that it is necessary for developers to arrange for archaeological fieldwork to take place prior to development, in appropriate circumstances.
- 1.4 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by Halliday, Fraser Munro on behalf of Tenants First Housing Co-operative Ltd to undertake the work; the field element of which was carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May 2010.
- 1.5 A watching brief which is also required applies to an area which will not be developed for some time so this element of the work will be undertaken separately.

**2. Desk-top survey**

- 2.1 A search was carried out in the Sites and Monuments Record, Archaeology Service, Aberdeen City Council and in the Sites and Monuments Records of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland (RCAHMS) through Canmore, Canmap and Pastmap.

- 2.2 The development site incorporates the ground of the former Donside Paper Mills, the buildings of which have been demolished since its closure in 2001. A historical study in the Aberdeen City Archaeological SMR gives evidence for industrial use of the ground since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century ( report appended to Cameron 2003).
- 2.3 A previous evaluation was undertaken of parts of the development site in 2003 (Cameron, 2003).

### **3. The Site**

- 3.1 The development site is located on the W bank of the river Don at Tillydrone, to the E side of Tillydrone Road and Gordon Mills Road.  
NGR: NJ 93450 09097 (Flood detention area S end of site) to NJ 93148 09523 (Hydro scheme area N end of site). Parish:Aberdeen
- 3.2 Most of the main development area has already been levelled and prepared for development. The two areas under evaluation had only been partially cleared at the time of this evaluation.
- 3.3 Don Cottage had been gutted by fire and levelled to the top of the ground floor some months before the Standing Building survey- as a result this element of the work was limited to producing a ground plan and photographs..

### **4. Methodology**

- 4.1 In Areas 1 and 2 the trenches were excavated using a JCB. Due to the depth part of the work was done with a toothed bucket but in trenches 2-4 the top of natural was cleaned with a toothless ditching bucket.

## **5. The Evaluation**

5.1 A total of four trenches were excavated comprising 5% of the specified areas. Trenches 1-3 were in the Hydro scheme area at the N end of the site, trench 4 was in the Flood detention area at the S end of the site.

### Hydro Scheme area

The Hydro Scheme area lies on what was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a diversion of part of the river to supply the 19<sup>th</sup> century mills with water power. The line of the 19<sup>th</sup> century works are shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> OS map of 1867 (pub 1869). After the mills stopped using water power this area had been used as a dumping ground and between c 1 and 4m of industrial dumping had filled in the former channel, the dumping being deepest to the E. Part of this dumped material had been removed prior to this evaluation and the evaluation trenches were cut from the base of this lowered area, where the new Hydro- electric scheme water channel will run.

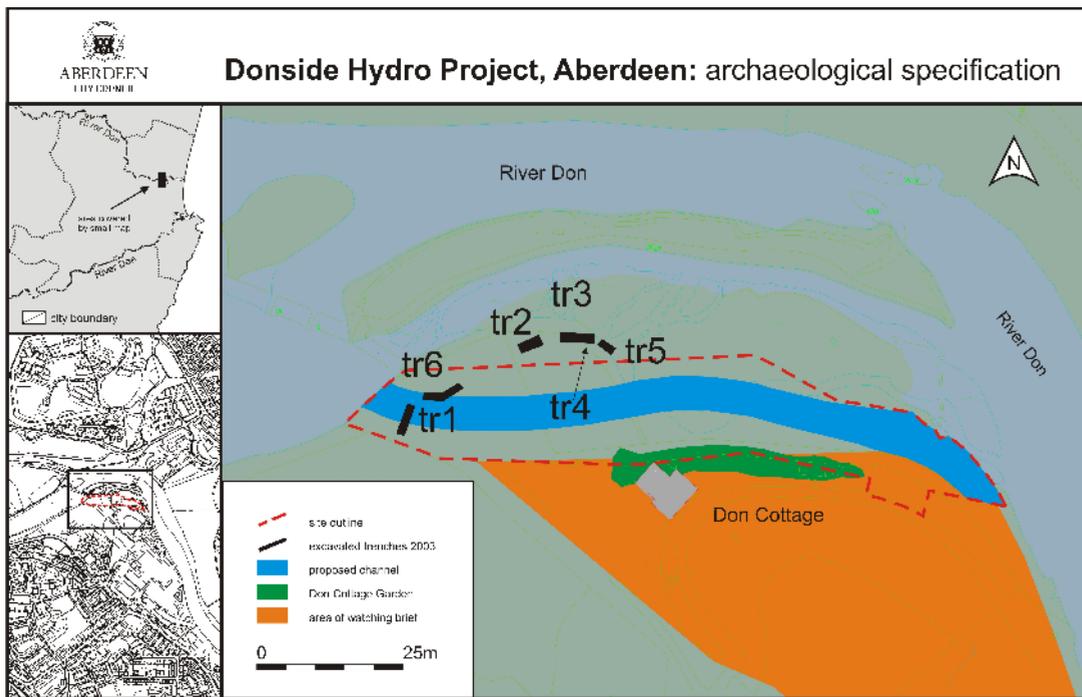
Levels were taken in relation to the site levels marked on site.



**Illus 1 Hydro scheme area looking SE**



Illus 2 Plan of Hydro Scheme area with trenches 1-3



Illus 3 2010 evaluation trenches (red) related to the trenches excavated in 2003

### Trench 1

NGR: NJ93170 09541

Trench details: 4m long x 2m wide. Orientated WNW/ESE

Level of top of trench 8.76OD Top of natural 7.26 OD

The top of the trench was c 3m below the top level of the (removed) dumped rubbish. The trench was excavated to a total depth of 2.4m.

A band of stoney rubble c 2m wide crossed the site at the trench surface, this unstructured stone rubble continued to c 1.5m depth below surface. Below it there was sandy gravel natural with some large stones mixed in the top. It is considered that this is probably the remains of the weir shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1867 (pub 1869).



**Illus 4 Trench 1, section**

### Trench 2

NGR: NJ 93148 09523

Trench details: 3m long x 1.5m wide. Orientated E/W

Level of top of trench 9.16m OD Top of natural 7.56m OD

The top of the trench was c 2m below the top level of the (removed) dumped rubbish. The trench was excavated to a total depth of 2m.

There was 1.5m of redeposited earth with brick and concrete rubble mixed through it. A limited amount of plastic and china was mixed in the rubble.

This overlay c 100mm of fairly clean grey silt from 1.5 to 1.6m depth from surface.

From 1.6- 2.0m Clean yellow gravel natural. There was no evidence of any anthropomorphic activity.

### Trench 3

NGR: NJ 93125 09510

Trench details: 3m long x 1.8m wide. This was excavated to a total depth of 3.3m below the existing surface.

Level of top of trench 9.59m OD Top of natural 8.09m OD

There was c 1.5m of redeposited soil with dumped rubbish including tree trunks, stone and wire- the lower part of this was grey siltier and cleaner.

From 1.5m to 3.3m there were clean natural sands and gravels. There was no evidence of any anthropomorphic activity.

### Interpretation

In trenches 2 and 3 in the Hydro Scheme area there appeared to be dumped material over natural gravels and a thin layer of silt which in relation to the evidence of the 1<sup>st</sup> OS map can best be interpreted as part of the river channel for the mill's water power. Trench 1 appeared to cut through a very disturbed band of stone that may relate to the 19<sup>th</sup> century weir although no structure remained. There was no evidence of any earlier activity and in the light of the map evidence it is unlikely that any would have survived the apparent extent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century water power systems.

### Flood detention area

Evaluation of the flood detention area at the S end of the site was very restricted due to the presence of both high voltage electricity cables and a sewerage system. A single trench was excavated and in the light of the deep deposits of dumped material and the unstable condition of the trench sides, it was not extended.

### Trench 4

NGR: NJ 93450 09097

Trench details: 4m long x 1.5m wide. This was excavated to a total depth of 2.8m below the existing surface.

Level of top of trench 9.30m OD Top of natural 6.50m OD

There were layers of dumped cinder, ash and slag from the existing surface to the top of natural gravel at a depth of 2.8m below the surface. There was no evidence of any anthropomorphic activity on the natural.





**Illus 7 Trench 4 with river Don behind**

## **6. Standing Building Survey**

The standing building survey was undertaken on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2010. At this time the building had been burnt out some months previously and partially demolished with only 2.5-3m of the wall height remaining. However it was possible to survey the ground plan and to note some details of construction and development that would not have been visible when the building was described in 2003 when it was awarded Listed Building status (Category B. HB number 49191. Item 185A).

Don Cottage is shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> OS 25"/mile map of 1867 (Aberdeen sheet lxxv.3. pub 1869) and was considered in the description on the statutory list to have been built in the 1830s- 1840s.

In 1867 it is shown as a front block on the S side- the remains of which survive- and a smaller rectangular block at the rear (N side) attached by a link section. This N section was not present at the time of survey and appeared to have been demolished prior to the fire as the link opening had been blocked and harled. Prior to the fire the front section had been white painted over concrete pebble-dashed harl. The base course, timber column and door/window frames were painted black.

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**Illus 8 Ground plan of Don Cottage superimposed on 1st OS detail**



**Illus 9 Photograph SE Elevation (Aberdeen City Council 2002)**



**Illus 10 SE Elevation 2010**

SE front elevation. Central door flanked by french windows. Only the openings survived, with traces of the moulded concrete architrave.



**Illus 11 Detail of pilaster by E french window SE elevation**

There had originally been a balcony at 1<sup>st</sup> floor level supported by rustic style tree trunks. One of these survived at the W side of the W french window. It was half-sectioned and c 320mm in diameter with a square plate on the top to support the balcony. Only the traces of the bases of the other columns remained. The area below the balcony, c 1.2m wide, had been paved with stone slabs.

Central door H:2.27m W: 1.1m. French windows : H:2.16m W: 1.1m.

The original paintwork on the architraves appeared to have been a deep wine/red.

*Walls:* All the walls had been harled with concrete and pebble-dash. This was over brick walls c 350-400mm thick. The bricks were of purple/red similar to those produced by the brickworks in the Seaton area.

Internally in most areas the walls had been clad in lathe and plaster, although in the front E room there was some later plaster board. The internal cladding had been partially removed by the fire and a number of blocked features could be seen as a result. These are noted on plan. Some were brick-blocked and possibly fairly old alterations but a large opening in the N wall and a window opening in the N wall had been blocked with breeze blocks and appeared more recent. The large opening was

the blocking of the link section through to the N part of the building demolished post 2003 but prior to the fire in 2009.

The other blockings were fireplaces in the SE, SW and NW rooms and a blocking of a ? secondary or earlier fireplace beside the large hearth in the NE room. There originally appears to have been a central chimney between the SE and NE rooms and chimneys in the W gable.



**Illus 12 Blocked fireplace in SE room**



**Illus 13 NE room. Blocked fireplace, open hearth with metal lintel and 1st floor fireplace**



**Illus 14 Plan of Don Cottage**

Internally little other detail survived although some of the tiling in the entrance area remained and was photographed.



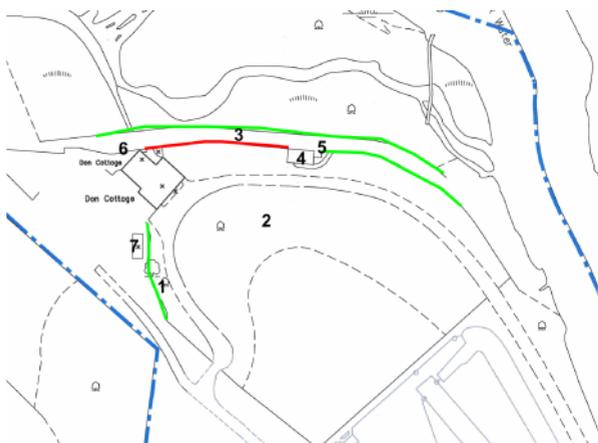
**Illus 15** Detail of tiling in passage



**Illus 16** Detail of moulded skirting in SE room

## Garden

There is a remnant of a small fairly informal garden on the S side of Don Cottage on either side of the driveway that curved in a C- shape from the front of the building, one arm leading up to the mill, the other parallel to the river.



**Illus 17 Don Cottage garden.**

*1 Stone wall with raised bed. 2 open area of grass and mature trees and shrubs. 3 brick wall revetting raised terrace walk. 4 ruins of shed with blocked window in blocked door to terrace. 5 gateway to terrace through stone wall that continued line of brick wall. 6 breeze block 'room' abutting wall. 7 breeze block garage.*

On the W side, the garden was bounded by a stone wall (1) with a raised bed containing generally low ground cover shrubs. On the E side, there was a brick wall (3) built of the same 19<sup>th</sup> century bricks as the house and this appears to be shown on 1867 OS map. The inner face of the wall had semi-circular vertical buttresses. It appeared to be revetting a raised terrace along the E side of the garden. Cut stumps indicate a line of trees had originally stood along this higher level. Steps led from the lower level to this higher terrace and the small shed (4) abutting the wall had originally opened to the terrace. A gateway (5) in the wall to the S of the shed also opened on to it. The terrace also had a rougher wall of stone and pebble along the E side, between it and the river and there appears to have been a walkway between the walls above the river level and above the garden level. To the N of the cottage a breeze block structure (6) had been attached to the wall, apparently with access to the N part of the house (now missing). A breeze block garage (7) stood to the NW of the cottage.



**Illus 18 Wall showing curved 'buttress' and steps to upper terrace path**

Plantings: Mature trees including copper beech and elm in the grass (2) with hollies and rhododendrons and bulbs between them. Some ground cover shrubs (heathers, ? cotoneaster) and bulbs in bed alongside entrance drive. Buddelia along higher terrace to E of the brick wall may have been self seeded.

The overall impression is of a pleasant, fairly informal garden with low maintenance planting.



**Illus 19 Garden area 2, looking S**

## **7. Impacts and Mitigations**

71 No archaeological features or finds were evident over the area of the site apart from those 19<sup>th</sup> century features relating to Don Cottage and to the possible weir.

Impacts

None.

Mitigations

None.

**8. Mitigation Measures**

8.1 None.

8.2 Although no archaeological features or finds were evident in the evaluation trenches, this does not preclude the possibility of chance finds or archaeological discoveries outwith the evaluation trenches.

Should such chance finds occur during the ground clearance for the development, then the Archaeology Service, Aberdeen City Council, or Murray Archaeological Services Ltd, must be informed immediately so that an appropriate archaeological response can be formulated and agreed by all parties concerned.

**References**

Cameron, A 2003 *Donside Paper Mills: Archaeological assessment July 2003*. Unpublished grey literature report in Aberdeen City SMR.

Photographs supplied to archive on CD

| <b>Digital frame No</b> | <b>Content</b>         |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1-3                     | SE front facade        |
| 4-5                     | W end SE facade        |
| 6-7                     | E end SE facade        |
| 8-9                     | Central door SE facade |

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 10      | Tiling in passage   |
| 11-14   | SE facade looking W   |
| 15-18   | Detail of concrete moulded pilaster by E french window<br>SE facade |
| 19-21   | Ditto Central door  |
| 22-24   | W french window and rustic pillar                                   |
| 25-28   | scars of rustic pillars for balcony SE facade                       |
| 29-33   | Details rustic pillar by W french window                            |
| 34-36   | W wall  |
| 37-40   | SE wall looking E   |
| 41-48   | N wall details  |
| 49-55   | W facade and bay window   |
| 56-59   | Tiling in passage   |
| 60-64   | Blocked fireplace in SE room  |
| 65-68   | Detail of moulded skirting SE room                                  |
| 69-71   | Fireplace and blocked fireplace NE room                             |
| 72      | 1 <sup>st</sup> floor fireplace above NE room                       |
| 73-76   | Blocked and secondary blocking of window NE room                    |
| 77-80   | Blocked window and lower floor area to W of NE room                 |
| 81-84   | Possible line of weir looking N                                     |
| 85-91   | Tr 1 looking NW   |
| 92-96   | Tr 2 looking SW   |
| 97-98   | Tr 2 looking NE   |
| 99-101  | Bottom of Tr 2, looking NW  |
| 102-104 | General views of Hydro project area, looking N                      |
| 105-111 | Tr 3 looking NW   |
| 112     | Tr 3, general view, looking NW                                      |
| 113-116 | General views looking SE at Hydro Project area                      |
| 117-123 | garden wall looking NE  |
| 124-131 | Tr 4, looking SW  |
| 132-134 | Tr 4, looking NW  |
| 135-137 | Tr 4, looking NE to river Don                                       |
| 055/01  | Garden area 1, looking S  |

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|           |                          |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| 055/02-03 | Garden area 1, looking N |
| 055/04    | Garage (7)               |
| 055/05-08 | Brick wall (3)           |
| 055/09-11 | Shed (4)                 |
| 055/13-14 | Garden Area 2, looking S |
| 055/15-17 | Garden area 'room' (6)   |