



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the past and future together

Watching Brief



Littleferry Pilots House

Sutherland

December 2006

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Watching Brief:

Littleferry Pilots House Sutherland

December 2006

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Planning Ref	
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on excavations for an extension to the Pilot's House, Littleferry, Sutherland, as a condition of Planning Permission. No features or artefacts of archaeological significance were found. There are no recommendations for further archaeological work in this case.

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Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Amanda Hoare for commissioning the work. The archaeological fieldwork and all photography was undertaken by John Wombell; the project overall was managed by John Wood. Mapping is reproduced here by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217

Introduction

A desk-based assessment and archaeological watching brief were carried out in December 2006 by Highland Archaeological Services Ltd at the Pilot's House, Littleferry, in response to a planning condition. The purpose was to identify and record the nature and extent of any archaeological features likely to be affected by an extension to the house. This report describes the work and presents the results. The weather and ground conditions were cold and windy but dry. As may be expected in December in Sutherland, light levels were low.



Figure 1 Site Location

Mapping reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey: Licence 100043217.

Location

The site is centred approximately at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NH 806 956. It is within the local authority area of the Highland Council, which is advised on archaeological matters by its Archaeology Unit staff based within the Council's Planning and Development Service (HCAU).

Archaeology background

Littleferry is situated on a small peninsula, with the Loch Fleet Nature Reserve along the north to southwest boundaries and the yellow sand beaches of the Dornoch Firth along the northeast to south boundaries. The Pilot's House is by the former ferry pier.

Previous archaeological finds in the area surrounding the village include fragments of Pictish stone carvings and stone artefacts and flint debitage. Human burials have also been found at Littleferry in the 1930s and again in 2003 (HSMR NH89NW0070-72). Some of these may relate to a skirmish between Jacobite and government troops in 1746. (Highland SMR NH89NW0070-72). Also, in 2003, a shell midden was located in the garden of a Littleferry home (Highland SMR NH89NW0069).

Littleferry lies on the former main road north to Caithness, at the northern crossing point of Loch Fleet. Although the ferry has been superseded by the Mound to the west, built by Thomas Telford in 1814-16, which carries the modern road across, it is likely that there has been a river crossing point in this locality from the earliest times. Finds from the general area have included Neolithic material and an important collection of Pictish carved stones. Near the present site the footings have been noted of a group of buildings arranged around a courtyard (HSMR NH89NW0068).

Policy background

The planning and policy framework in this case includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*¹, and the Scottish Executive's *National Planning Policy Guidance Notes 5 (NPPG5)*² and 18 (NPPG18)³, and *Planning Advice Note 42 (PAN42)*⁴ (SOEND 1994). The fundamental principles underpinning the above policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2002)⁵ and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).⁶

¹ <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1998/10/nppg5>

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1999/04/nppg18>

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1994/01/17081/21711>

⁵ www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf

⁶ <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

Aims and objectives

To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.

To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to preserve these where possible and record where necessary in line with the Highland Council's Structure Plan, NPPG 5 and PAN 42.

To ensure that any artefacts or human remains are dealt with in accordance with legal requirements and current Historic Scotland policy guidance.

Programme

The work was designed to meet the requirements of the Highland Council Archaeology Unit. It followed the project design set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Report HAS061201) submitted to the Highland Council on 1 December 2006.



Figure 2 1st Edition OS 1:10560 map 1879 (not to scale)

Derived from digital mapping courtesy of Landmark Information Group Ltd.

1. Desk Based Assessment

A check of all relevant archaeological / historical records, maps and aerial photographs was undertaken. An online check was made of the Statistical Accounts, National Library of Scotland Map collection, National Monuments Record and Highland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). The SMR was also checked for updates in the Council offices in Inverness, where the RAF 1947 aerial photographs were also examined. Historic Ordnance Survey mapping was also checked; the First Edition 1:10560 (6 inch) map of 1878 is reproduced above (Fig 2). However, no archaeological features were found within or adjoining the proposal area.

2. Watching Brief

A watching brief was carried out by John Wombell on 4 December 2006 on excavations for the house extension foundations.

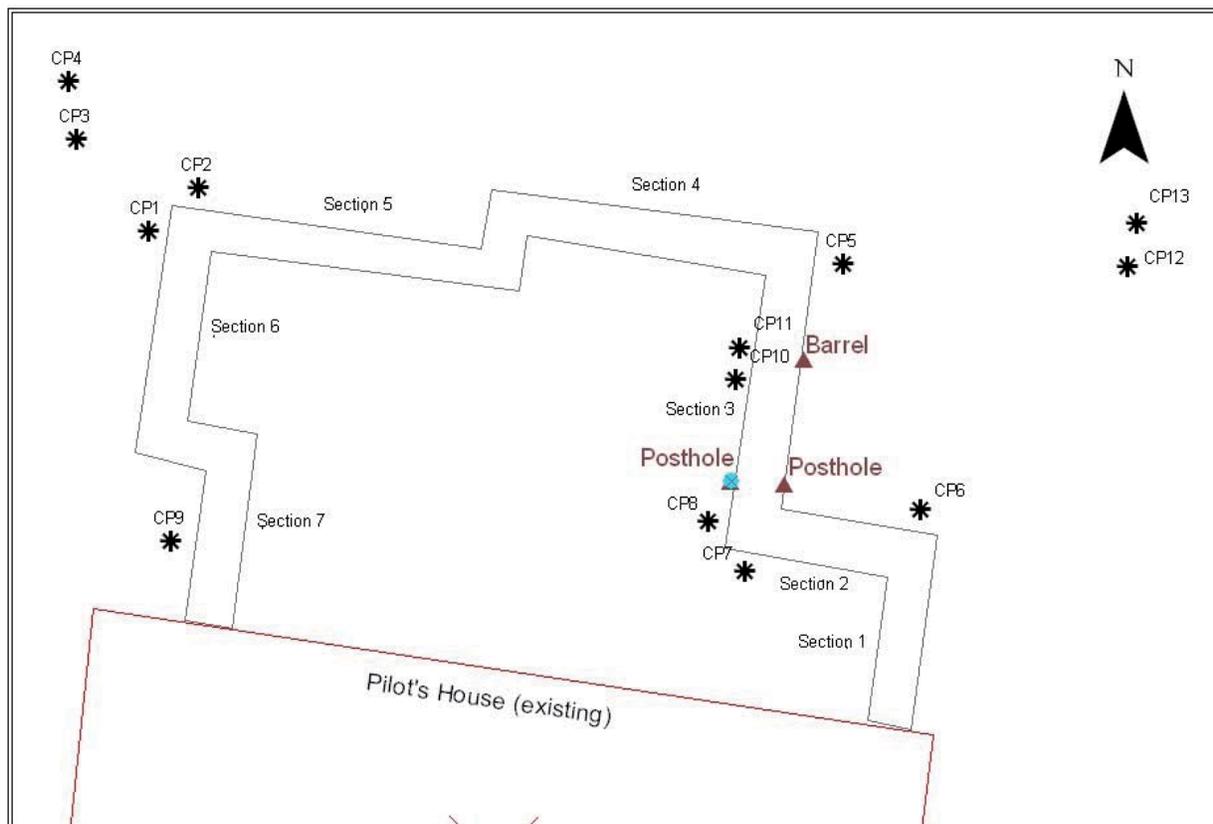


Figure 3 Site plan (from sketch: not to scale)

Results

The site of the extension lies on the N side of Pilot's House, on virtually level ground.

Prior to and in preparation for the formation of the foundation trenches, the old extension built around 1970 (pers. comm. Mrs Hoare) had been demolished and completely removed from the site, including what it is assumed was a concrete slab floor. It was difficult to estimate how much additional material under the old extension had been removed, but the site was generally quite clean and free of demolition debris. Possibly no more than 100mm of additional material had been removed during site clearance.

Beyond the limits of the old extension the natural fine turf had been roughly stripped by machine, and an additional strip of ground levelled, as the new extension is to be somewhat larger than the old one. It appears that the levelling works had cut into a natural gravel bank but to what extent it was impossible to judge, as the turf had been re-laid on the exposed bank surface and the extension to the level area smoothed off. The ground surface of this additional strip of levelled ground was seen on the day as clean natural yellow/orange sand. It is unlikely that any disturbance to the bank was of any archaeological significance (See Fig 4 and photos 001-1, 001-2, 002-1 and 002-2).



Figure 4 The site at the outset of the watching brief, showing bank to N

There were a number of redundant electric and water pipes partially exposed on the ground surface prior to the formation of the foundation trenches.

The works consisted of the formation of a single continuous trench approx 450mm deep and 600mm wide, with a number of 90 degree angle changes. For convenience this trench has been divided into 7 sections (See Fig 3 above). The 2 x 0.9m long trench sections have been ignored and not numbered as in practice they appeared on the ground as overlaps between the longer sections of trench.

Trench Section 1

This adjoins the NE corner of the house. The trench here cuts through c 350mm of brown sandy soil, most probably part of a former garden, into orange sand partially contaminated and mixed due to a redundant 100mm fireclay sewer pipe crossing the trench at c 450mm deep to the invert, c 1m away from the back wall of the house, and a redundant steel pipe at a higher level, c 0.6m away from the back wall of the house, the original purpose of which no one seemed to know. Both pipes were deliberately cut during trench formation. Some stone in the backfill of the redundant pipe trenches. There was also some sign of comparatively recent rat activity. No archaeological remains were present. A secondary dark stained band seen below the garden soil was possibly due to leaching. There were no finds.

Trench Section 2

Section 2 lay at right angles to section 1, approx 1.9m in length. It cut through similar old garden soil. There was some disturbance here due to rat activity, including a rat's nest.



Figure 5 View E from CP8. Post or stakehole in section on extreme left.

Trench Section 3

This lay at right angles to section 2. About half way along this section the old garden soil faded out and the trench went into natural, mostly undisturbed mixed gravel and sand. Two (apparently modern) post or stake holes were cut by the trench about 1m from the S end of this section. They lay one on either side of the trench. These post holes are more or less in line with a present day chicken run, one post of which can just be seen top left in Fig 6 above behind some old plastic sewer pipe connectors. At c 1.8m from the N end of the trench on the E side, the bucket scraped past the buried remains of a wooden barrel with iron hoops, set vertically on end (See Fig 7, and photos 003/1, 003/2 and 004/1). The barrel was entirely outwith the foundation trench and was not investigated further. One find came out of the clean gravel at the bottom of the trench, possibly a fossilised tooth.

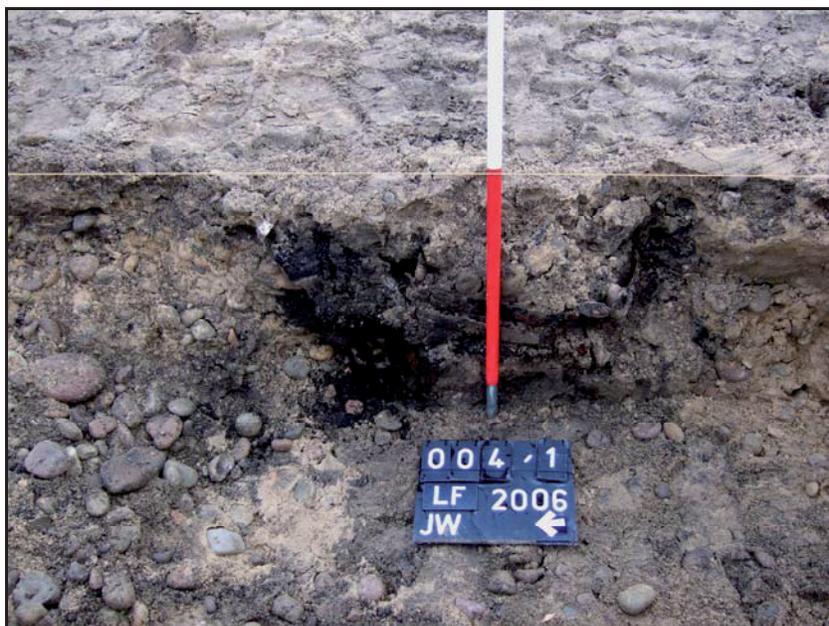


Figure 6 Barrel showing in E Section

Trench Sections 4, 5, 6 and 7

All these sections were cut through mixed sand and gravel and revealed no archaeology and no finds. Several now-redundant pipes and cables had been previously laid across the line of sections 6 and 7 and the ground in places had consequently been disturbed and mixed in the past.

Recommendations

1. There are no areas that warrant preservation *in situ*.
2. No further work is proposed and on completion of the fieldwork we recommended that archaeological clearance should be given to the site.

Appendix 1: Photographs

A full set of photographs is included on the accompanying CDROM. Camera locations are shown in Fig 5 above.

Notes:

1. The white arrow on the photo board points approx north in each shot.
2. From 003 onwards the first exposure is taken in natural light and the second exposure of the same shot using flash (suffixed B). The better colour likeness is the shot taken with flash.
3. One of the builders was in the trench during excavation preparing the base for the concrete to follow, so material has been knocked in, taken off the sides etc. to obtain the formation level the builders wanted. The bottom of the trenches may therefore not appear clean in the photos.

Photo No.	Camera Location	Notes	Taken by	Date
001-1	CP12	Pre start site view, taken from NE corner of site looking SW	J Wombell	04/12/2006
001-2	CP13	Pre start site view, taken from NE corner of site looking due W	J Wombell	04/12/2006
002-1	CP3	Pre start site view, taken from NW corner of site looking SE	J Wombell	04/12/2006
002-2	CP4	Pre start site view, taken from NW corner of site looking due E	J Wombell	04/12/2006
003-1	CP10	Barrel exposed taken from W side of trench section 3 looking approx NE	J Wombell	04/12/2006
004-1	CP11	Barrel exposed taken from W side of trench section 3 looking approx E	J Wombell	04/12/2006
005-1	CP6	Trench section 1 taken from N looking S towards the house	J Wombell	04/12/2006
006-1	CP8	Trench section 2 taken from W looking E	J Wombell	04/12/2006
007-1	CP7	Trench section 3 taken from S looking N	J Wombell	04/12/2006
008-1	CP5	Trench section 4 taken from E looking W	J Wombell	04/12/2006
009-1	CP1	Trench section 5 taken from W looking E	J Wombell	04/12/2006
010-1	CP2	Trench section 6 taken from N looking S	J Wombell	04/12/2006
011-1	CP9	Side view of trench section 7 taken from W side looking E	J Wombell	04/12/2006
LFY06 View S		View S to a stormy narrows, tide rip into the wind	J Wombell	04/12/2006