

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological field evaluation undertaken to the E of Dull Parish Church, 5km W of Aberfeldy, Perth & Kinross. The evaluation was a condition attached by Perth & Kinross Council on the advice of its archaeological advisors, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), to ensure that any surviving archaeological record was taken into consideration during a proposed development (Planning Application reference number 07/00473/FUL).

The development will comprise the construction of a new residential unit (Plot 2) for Ms Suki Urquhart who agreed to the archaeological works in the context of National Planning Policy Guidelines 5 (Archaeology and Planning) and in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which had been agreed between the council, PKHT, Ms Urquhart and Scotia Archaeology. John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology undertook the evaluation on 27th July 2007.

THE SITE

The development site is located on the N side of the village of Dull, some 40m NE of its parish church. The church, which was deconsecrated some years ago, is thought to date from the 17th century although documentary evidence suggests that there was a monastic settlement at Dull as early as the late 7th century, a church being mentioned on records from the early 13th century. Excavations were undertaken inside the church in 2003, when the remains of clay-bonded walls of unknown date were uncovered (DES 2003, 105). Over the years, several fragments of early Christian stones and cross slabs have been retrieved from within and around the village. It was once thought that the remains of the early ecclesiastical settlement were located in a field to the S of the village but excavations in the 1960s failed to find any evidence to support this assumption and it is more likely that it lies beneath the modern village.

Located on the steeply sloping N side of the Tay valley, the plot consists of a roughly rectangular area, measuring approximately 40m N/S by 25m wide. At the time of the evaluation it was covered with grass, thistles, rushes, birch saplings and other rough vegetation. The footprint for the house (centred on NGR: NN 80689 49216) lies at the N end of the plot, the S half of the area being quite boggy.

Overall, the site covered an area of some 1230m² of which 5% (61.5m²) was to be trenched during the evaluation. It was bounded on its N and E sides by drystone dykes which were in a ruinous state but which had been augmented by fences which continued around the S edge of the area where a few semi-mature trees stood. To the immediate W of the house plot was a path leading from the village to the rear of the church and its car park and to the former Catholic Church which was relocated recently from Home Street, Aberfeldy.

THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was the first stage of a programme that was to ensure that any archaeological remains surviving on the site and which were threatened by its development were preserved, either *in situ* or by record. It was understood that should the results of the evaluation prove significant, they were to be used to develop a strategy for further investigation.

The proposed layout of trenches (shown in the WSI) concentrated on the house footprint at the N end of the site with two more trenches extending further down the slope. However, circumstances forced a change of strategy at the outset. It had been intended to excavate two E/W trenches across the site but the gradient of the slope made it unsafe for a machine to operate in that direction. In addition, a trench intended for the E side of the area had to be abandoned because of the proximity of a large bush which is to be retained.

Four trenches were excavated using a toothless ditching bucket on a 360° tracked mechanical excavator. All the trenches were aligned N/S and all four cut across the line of the proposed house. Indeed, it was difficult to excavate elsewhere on the site because of the boggy nature of the ground and the presence of several trees. The trenches were all 1.2m wide, the width of the machine bucket. They were all roughly parallel and separated by gaps of approximately 2m.

Trench 1

Trench 1, which was 16m long, was located towards the W side of the site, 5m from the path. Topsoil comprised dark brown, silty loam and was 0.2m deep at its N end, deepening to 0.4m further S. In most of the trench it lay directly on glacial till, comprising orange-brown boulder clay which included some very large stones. Towards the S end of the trench the till was grey in colour and was overlain by peaty material where the ground was quite waterlogged.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 18m long and the stratigraphic sequence within it was identical to that in Trench 1, apart from two relatively modern field drains, one of them a rubble drain, cutting across the trench, midway along its length.

Trench 3

This trench was only 9m long, the ground beyond its S end being too wet for the machine to excavate without the risk of being stuck. The sequence of deposits in this trench was the same as in Trenches 1 and 2.

Trench 4

Measuring 8m long, Trench 4 was located towards the E side of the field, the materials within it being identical to those in the other three trenches.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered in any of the trenches. The only artefacts retrieved during the investigation comprised a small number of 19th- and 20th-century ceramic fragments which were not retained.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the ground conditions, it was not possible to trench far beyond the limits of the footprint of the new house although the results of the evaluation strongly suggest that little or nothing would be gained from further archaeological investigation of the site. The ground slopes quite steeply in Plot 2, suggesting that the early Christian settlement would have been

located on level ground further S where most of the modern village now stands. It is quite feasible that the original monastic foundation and the later medieval church were established close to, or even on, the site of the standing church.

REFERENCE

DES *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*, Council for Scottish Archaeology. Edinburgh.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

All photographs are digital images.

- 1 Trench 1, viewed from N.
- 2 Trench 2, viewed from N.
- 3-5 Site during excavation, viewed from N.
- 6-8 Site during excavation, viewed from S.
- 9 Trench 3, viewed from N.
- 10 Trench 4, viewed from N.
- 11-19 Panoramic views from site.