

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken at West Herdhill Farm, Westmuir, near Kirriemuir, Angus Council having granted planning consent to erect a new agricultural shed on the site (Planning Reference Number 09/00012/FUL). The council, on the advice of its consultants, the Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service, imposed a condition whereby a watching brief was carried out during the removal of topsoil from the footprint of the shed.

The watching brief was sponsored by Mr John Grant of Reddie Farm, Westmuir and was carried out in the context of National Planning Policy Guidelines 5 (Archaeology and Planning) by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 10th February 2009.

THE SITE

West Herdhill Farm lies on the east side of the village of Westmuir and 1.5km west of Kirriemuir, Angus. The site of the new shed was immediately adjacent to an existing shed, making it the easternmost of the farm buildings. It was located on ground that sloped gently down through arable farmland towards the A926 Blairgowrie to Kirriemuir road.

The evident presence of a Roman road (NO35SE 68) near to West Herdhill led to the requirement of the watching brief. The precise course of this road is unclear: stretches of it have been identified on the ground over many years; and part of what appeared to be a double-ditched road was traced from aerial photographs in 1949. There is still debate concerning the precise line this road followed although its approximate south-west to north-east alignment is generally accepted. It is also unclear which forts it connected although it probably ran from the Flavian (1st century AD) fort of Cardean (NO24NE 12) to either Battledykes (NO45NE 12) or Finavon (SO45NE 21). In either case, it would have passed very close to – or actually through – West Herdhill.

More information on the road and its alignment can be found in the records of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and accessed by means of their on-line resources, Pastmap and Canmore.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The new shed will measure 60m north/south by 30m wide although, as well as being under crop until a short time ago, much of the ground that it will occupy had been more heavily disturbed in the recent past. The construction of the adjacent shed had affected the area to its immediate west while the east side had been cut during the excavation of a drainage gully. Furthermore, because of the distinct north to south slope, the south half of the area was to be built up, only the north half being excavated to any depth.

Vegetation had been removed from the entire footprint prior to any archaeological presence on the site although no damage had been wrought in this process. During the watching brief topsoil and a small quantity of the underlying subsoil were removed using a toothless ditching bucket attached to a 360° tracked excavator. The trench, centred on NO 36943 53309, was approximately 40m long and 15m wide.

Topsoil was approximately 0.3m deep and consisted of dark brown, humic loam which gave onto glacial till of red-brown boulder clay. The only features evident at the boundary between topsoil and subsoil were linear field drains of comparatively recent date which ran north to south down the slope. No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered and no artefacts of any description were retrieved from the site.

CONCLUSIONS

No trace of a Roman road or features that might be contemporary with one were found at West Herdhill. Although the road's exact location has yet to be determined, there was nothing to suggest that it ran through the site of the new shed. However, although this may support the assumption that the road lay a short distance to the west of the main farm buildings, ploughing might also have removed all traces of its from this particular location.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

- 1 Trench fully excavated, viewed from the south
- 2 Trench fully excavated, viewed from the north
- 3-4 General shots of site, viewed from the north