

# LAND TO THE SW OF BIRSE CHURCH BIRSE, ABOYNE, AB34 5BY



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## ILLUSTRATIONS

(cover) Trench 1 facing NE with Birse Church in background

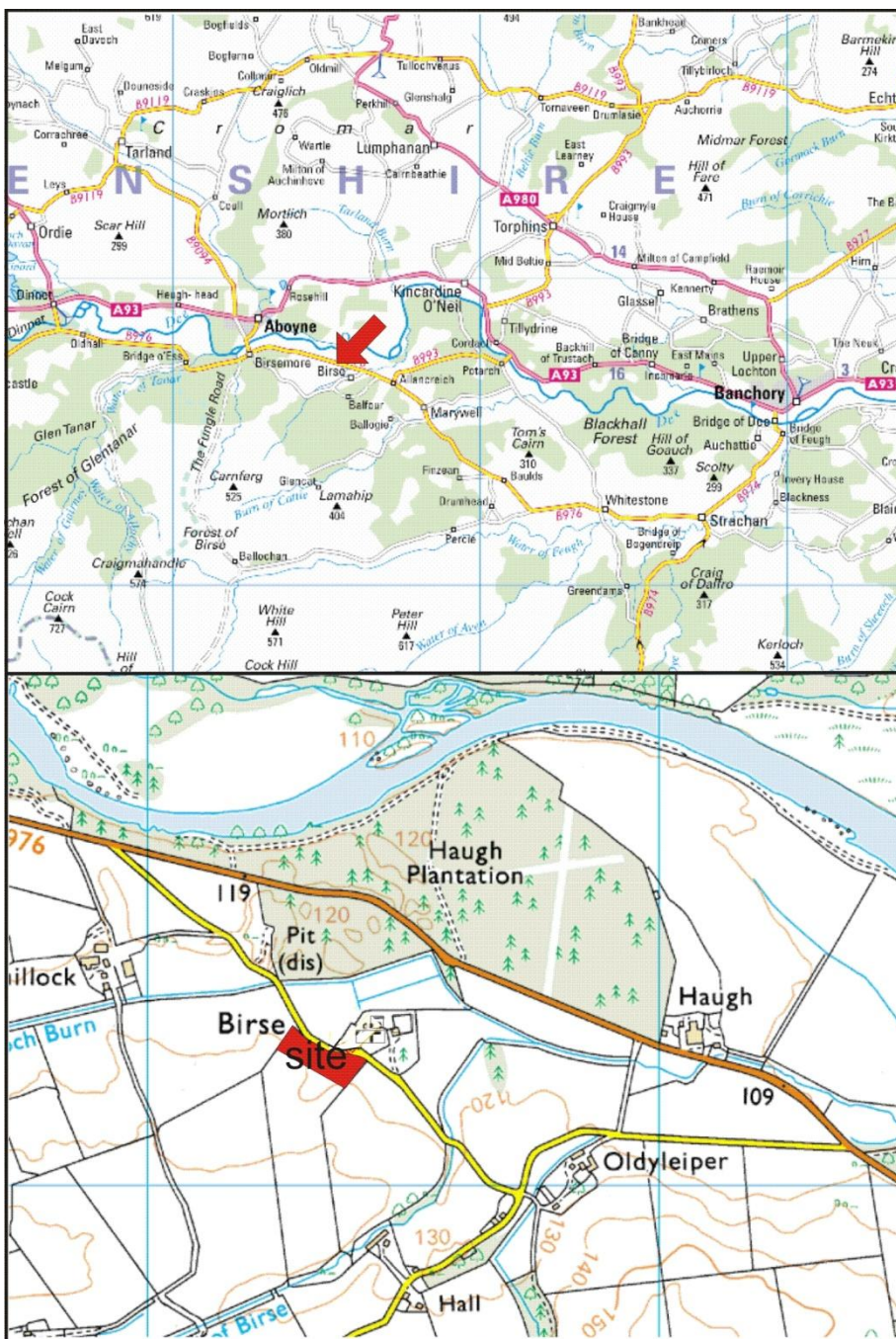
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## SUMMARY

A 7% archaeological evaluation was carried out on 16 September 2013. No archaeological features were identified and it is recommended that no further work is required during this graveyard extension but this is subject to advice from Aberdeenshire Archaeology Service.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

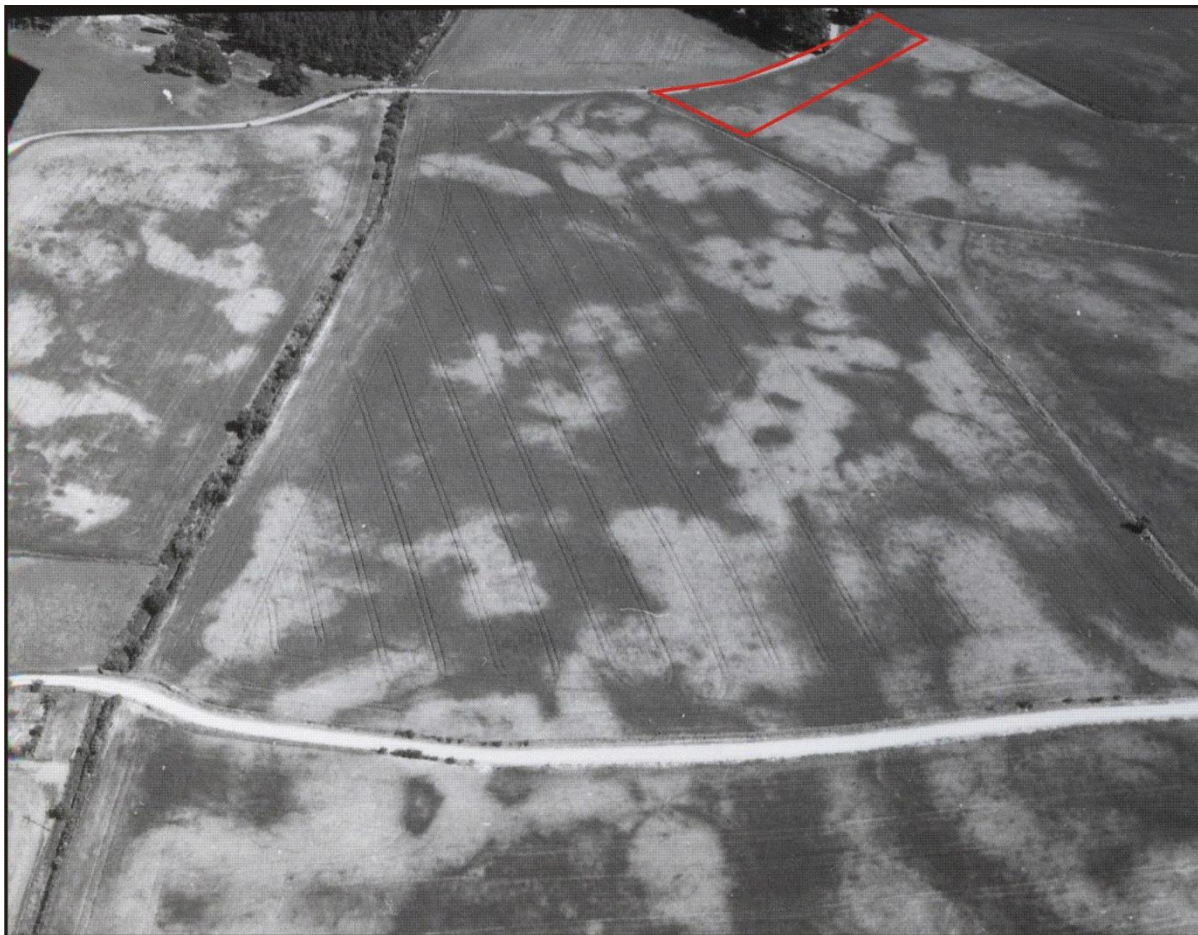
- 1.1 The site is located on the south side of an unclassified road SW of Birse Church. The site is at NO 55356 97247, at 110-120m OD and in Birse parish. It is 0.607 hectares in size and part of a larger cultivated field.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by Lisa Gray, Aberdeenshire Council and this WSI has been compiled by Alison Cameron, Cameron Archaeology. An application APP/2010/4076 was granted by Aberdeenshire Council on 3.5.11 and a standard archaeology condition (condition 4) attached requesting a 7-10% archaeological evaluation.
- 1.3 All the archaeological work will be carried out in the context of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) Planning Advice Note (PAN 2/2011) and Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), which state that archaeological remains should be regarded as part of the environment to be protected and managed.



Illus 1 Location plan (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2013)

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within 1km of the site.
- 2.2 One archaeological site extends into the proposed development area. Air photography has recorded the cropmarks of a possible rectilinear enclosure among others which may be of natural origin (NO59NE 61) and has recorded the cropmarks of circular enclosures, pits, ring-ditches and possible souterrains under cereal crops over a fairly extensive area of fields on a gentle slope at an altitude of 125m OD (NO59NE 80; Illus 2). There are also traces of rectangular enclosures which may represent earlier field boundaries, with faint traces of rig and furrow cultivation showing as cropmarks.



Illus 2 Aerial photograph showing site (in red) and cropmarks in foreground (AAS/00/11/G26/4-9 and AAS/00/11/CT/1-8, flown 20 July 2000)

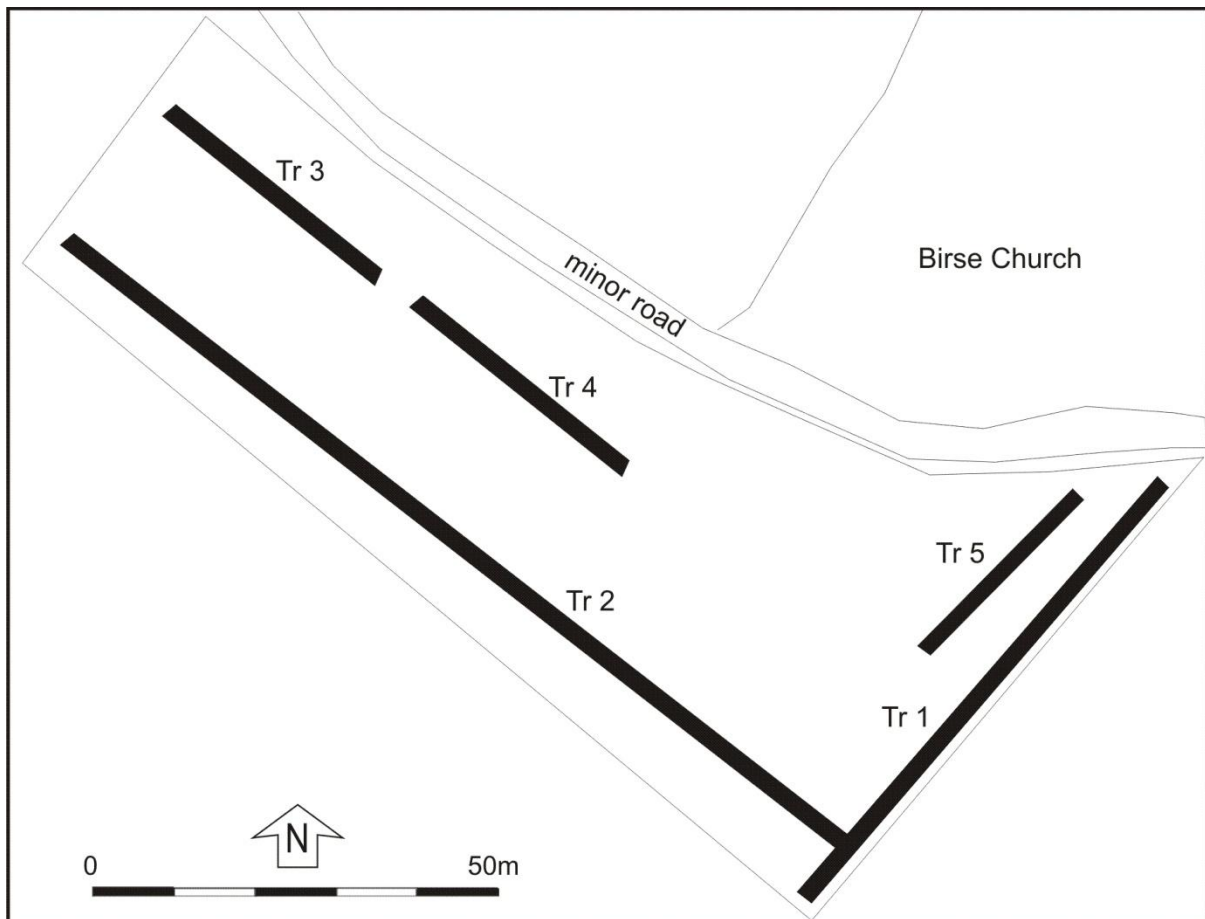
- 2.3 A chisel-shaped flint axe (NO59NE 10), a flint fabricator (NO59NE 13) and a flint knife (NO59NE 11) were found at Birse and were purchased for National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (Proc Soc Antiq Scot 1893, 11). Three bronze flat axes (NO59NE 24) found at Birse, probably separately, formed part of the collection of John Rae, Aberdeen, which was sold in November 1892 (Coles 1971, 79). One is now thought to be a fake (Schmidt and Burgess 1981, 254). A ribbed melon bead of green paste (NO59NE 8) found at Birse (NO 55 97) was purchased for the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) in 1892. It is included by Curle in his corpus of "Objects of Roman and Provincial Roman Origin"(Curle 1932, 296).

- 2.4 A stone cist (NO59NE 33) was found on the south side of the public road on the farm of Oldyleiper. It was situated on top of an eminence and below a cairn of small stones. It consisted of five stones, two side slabs, two end slabs, a capstone and the bottom was "causewayed" with pebbles. Oriented E to W. it measured 1ft 8ins by 1ft 3ins 1ft 6ins deep, and contained a quantity of dark earth or ashes mixed with small pieces of human bones and fragments of a skull which appeared calcined or burnt. The farmer replaced the cove after examining the contents. (Dinnie 1865, 87-8).
- 2.5 A Roman coin (NO59NE 12) a 'small Brass Roman Coin of Emperor Valentinian I (364-375 AD) Brass Coin of Athens, Obv. helmeted head to right, Rev. AOH Minerva standing resting on a shield' was donated to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) in 1864 by Robert Dinnie, Wood Cottage, Birse. The coin may be from the Birse area (Proc Soc Antiq Scot 1865, 326-7).
- 2.6 Four silver coins were dug out of a grave in the Birse churchyard (NO59NE 43). They are much worn, but had originally been nearly the size of modern half crowns. They bear the inscription of "Robertus Scotorum Rex" on one side, and on the other, "Villa Edinburgh", "Villa Perth" (New Statistical Account 1834-45, 792).
- 2.7 What is probably a fragment of a Class I Pictish symbol stone (NO59NE 18.02) is built into a wall of the garden at Birse manse; it measures about 30cm square and bears a possible comb symbol with what may part of a 'beast' (Greig and Addy 1995, 34).
- 2.8 A stone with a groove (NO59NE 15) from Birse was donated to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) in 1887 by Dr Arthur Mitchell (Proc Soc Antiq Scot 1887, 286). A spindle whorl found at Birse (NO59NE 3) was in Aberdeen Regional Museum).
- 2.9 Earth houses (souterrains) were reported to have been found at Birse in the early 20th century but no further information is available (NO59NE 16; Callander 1935, 71).
- 2.10 Two possible stone circles (NO59NE 19) were recorded in the late 19th century but no further information is available (Jervise 1875-9, 47).
- 2.11 Birse (St Michael's) Church (NO59NE 18) was built in 1779 and renovated in 1855 and 1932 and is presumably on or near the site of the medieval parish church, mentioned in 1157 and dedicated to St Michael. No remains of the medieval church survive, but a 14-15th century (Jervise 1875-9, 47) sculptured slab from the foundation is built into the outside of the south wall of the churchyard, practically in the manse garden. The stone is 1.54m long by 0.3m wide at the top contracting to 0.2m wide at the base. The decoration, partly incised and partly in relief, represents a sword and two small crosses, one of them inverted (Eeles 1912, 365-7, 242). A well dedicated to St Michael (NO59NE23) was probably located at St Michael's Church but the location is unknown (Scott et al 1915-61, 82).
- 2.12 First Edition OS maps show a small field with trees at the extreme east of the current site (Appendix 2) which was incorporated into the larger field by the Second Edition OS (1900).

### 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

A 7% archaeological evaluation was carried out at this site on 16 September 2013. The work was carried out with a tracked JCB with a 1.8m ditching bucket. Five trenches (Illus 3) revealed 0.2m topsoil coverage at the SW end Trench 1 at the highest point in the field. A palaeochannel at the NE end Trench 1, also seen in Trenches 3, 4 and 5 was a maximum of 1.2 m deep. No archaeological features or finds were recorded during this work.

It is recommended that no further archaeological work is required during this graveyard extension but this is subject to advice from Aberdeenshire Archaeology Service.



Illus 3 Plan showing archaeological trenches



Illus 4 SE end Trench 2 showing shallow topsoil and deep modern ploughmarks

## 4 REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX 1 PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo no	Trench	Description	Facing
DSC7206-7211	1	Trench completed	SW
DSC7212-7225	1	Trench completed showing palaeochannel	SW
DSC7226-7230	1	SW end of trench showing shallow topsoil and deep modern plough marks	SW
DSC7231-7246	1	SW end of trench showing shallow topsoil and deep modern plough marks and trench 2 started	NE
DSC7247-7259	1	NE end showing palaeochannel	NE
DSC7260-7265	2	Trench 2 excavated	NW
DSC7266-7271	2	Trench 2 SE end deep plough marks and shallow topsoil	SE
DSC7272-7278	2	Trench 2 excavated	NW
DSC7279-7290	2	Trench 2 excavated	SE
DSC7291-7302	3	Trench 3 excavated	SE
DSC7303-7307	5	Trench 5 complete	SW



DSC\_7206



DSC\_7217



DSC\_7218



DSC\_7230



DSC\_7231



DSC\_7237



DSC\_7246



DSC\_7247



DSC\_7257



DSC\_7265



DSC\_7266



DSC\_7278



DSC\_7279



DSC\_7291



DSC\_7302



DSC\_7303