

**Midmar Church, Midmar, AB51 7NA
Installation of SSE cabling
Data Structure Report**



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SUMMARY

A watching brief was maintained on 11-13 September 2017 during the excavation of trenches by SSE for a new electricity supply. Trenches were excavated from the existing electric pole to the church. No archaeological features or finds were recorded and the trench has now been backfilled.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The site (Illus 1) is located on the N side of the B9119 in the grounds of Midmar Church between Upper Balblair to the N and North Lurg to the S. It is centred on NGR NJ69896 06522, at 190-210m OD in the parish of Midmar.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by SSE who are overlaying an existing cable at Midmar Church and require a watching brief along the line of the cable trench.
- 1.3 All the archaeological work was carried out in the context of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) Planning Advice Note (PAN 2/2011) and Historic Environment Scotland's Policy Statement (HESPS) 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 2017)

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

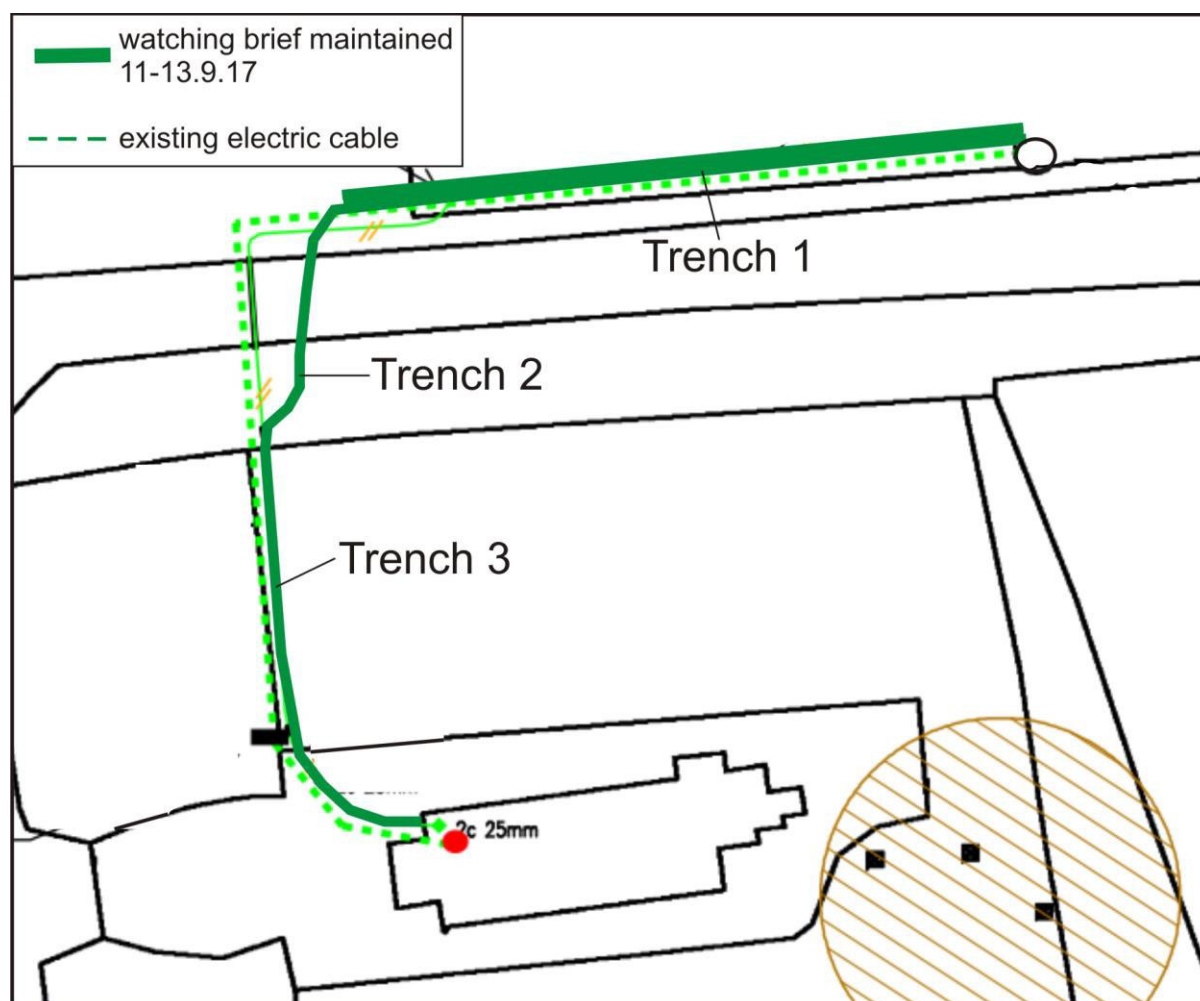
- 2.1 There are two Scheduled Monuments within 1km of the proposed trench. Within the Midmar graveyard is Christchurch stone circle (HER NJ60NE0003) and Christchurch standing stone (HER NJ60NE0002) 80m N of the proposed trench. The monument comprises the remains of a recumbent stone circle 17.3m in diameter. There are 8 stones still standing, including the recumbent stone, which measures 1.2m wide by 4.5m long. The flanking stones both measure 2.5m in height. The circle sits in the graveyard of Midmar Church, and any visible evidence for a ring cairn has been removed, probably during the development of the graveyard in the early 20th century. A single standing stone is situated in a strip of woodland about 110m NW of Midmar Church. It is a pink granite pillar measuring 0.55m in breadth by 0.5m and stands 2.6m high. This monument was scheduled in 1925, and again in 1970. (Shepherd 1996 162; Thom 1967, 135, 137, 142, 146).
- 2.2 The second Scheduled Monument is Midmar Church settlement and Cunningar Motte (HER NJ70NW0009). The monument comprises the site of the medieval settlement of Midmar. Its most prominent features are the motte, known as Cunningar Motte, and the old parish church. Between them is an area of open ground which is likely to contain the remains of the associated settlement. The motte was first scheduled in 1955 and this rescheduling is intended to incorporate all parts of the settlement. The monument lies in improved grassland, occupying a gentle spur between two watercourses. The motte comprises an artificial mound of earth measuring approximately 40m in diameter, and upstanding to a height of about 10m. The summit of the motte appears to have been ringed by an earthen bank to support the palisade but this may be the result of previous rabbit damage (Cunningar means rabbit warren). At the foot of the motte there are traces, particularly to the SW, of an encircling ditch. The motte was constructed to form the defensive base for the timber residence of either a Norman lord or a Normanised indigenous nobleman, and is likely to date to the 12th or the 13th century. Lordly occupation of the motte had ceased by the 16th Century when Midmar Castle was built almost a kilometre to the SE. The church as it stands dates from the 17th century but occupies the site of an earlier building. It is complete to wallheads and has been subdivided to form family burial enclosures. The church was abandoned in c.1787 when the new church was built over half a kilometre to the N. The likelihood that the ground between the motte and the church contained the related settlement is supported by the difficulty which stone in this field presents to the plough. At the NE edge of the field there is a strip of land which contrasts clearly with the rest of the field and may mark the line of a road.
- 2.3 Midmar parish church and burial ground (HER NJ60NE0020). Built in 1787, plain Improvement-period rectangular plan, in coursed squared cherry-cocked rubble, with bellcote. Five round-arched windows on south wall, west end rebuilt c.1885 with three lancets and porch and interior recast, other additions in 1942. Peter Jansen bell.
- 2.4 The Midmar war memorial (HER NJ60NE0031) stands within the churchyard at Midmar. It commemorates the dead of World War I. It is in the form of a Celtic cross with interlacing decoration on the arms and down part of the shaft. Near the base of the shaft, above an inscription, is carved a crown with a small cross through it, lying at an angle. The base is a slightly tapering, rectangular solid block with the names on the front. It stands on a one-step rectangular plinth. Full transcription of memorial held in AAS Digital Archive.
- 2.5 A cattle rubbing stone (HES NJ60NE 132) stands in the field on the W of Midmar Church. This stone is situated on a gentle S-facing slope in an arable field about 110m W of Midmar Church. It is a granite pillar measuring 0.4m in breadth from N

to S by 0.3m in thickness at ground-level and 1.35m in height. There is another at Marionburgh (HER NJ70NW0094).

- 2.6 The most likely location for this standing stone ('Corsetfield 1'), which was recorded by Alexander Keillor on 25 November 1923, is the field immediately S of Christchurch (NJ60NE 145). The stone has since been removed, but it measured 0.6m by 0.55m at ground-level and stood to a height of 1.6m.
- 2.7 To the N of the proposed cable trench there are Two areas of rig and furrow situated in dense coniferous woodland, one recorded by RCAHMS during field visit in 1998 and one recorded by C. Shepherd for Forestry Commission in 2008 (HER NJ60NE0071). The southern-most area of rigs, which measure about 8m in breadth and are aligned roughly N and S, have been truncated on the W by the excavation of a sand-pit. The northern-most area is described as having a wavelength of approx. 6m at the southern end, but the final two visible seem to have a wavelength of 10m. The rigs are then interrupted by a modern track.
- 2.8 At Upper Balblair there is the remains of what was originally considered to be a clearance cairn (HER NJ70NW0137) can now be seen to be the remains of a hut circle of approx. 11m diameter following clearance by Forestry Commission. The fact that some of the stones from it appear to have been heaped up into a cairn begs the suggestion that the clearance cairns, lying predominantly to the south and west of it, might relate to a subsequent period of site use. Its siting is slightly unusual, being set on the crest of a hill. There may be indications of slight dykes between the cairns, but this is not, at present, certain. Information from C. Shepherd, Forestry Commission.
- 2.9 To the S is Midmar Castle (HER NJ70NW0128) the remains of a 17th to 19th century designed landscape. 1570-5, George Bell. One of the largest and most harmonious of Aberdeenshire's many châteaux. On terrace above the Gormack Burn, Z-plan formed from massive square, four-storey central block with six-storey circular battlemented bedroom stack and four-storey-and-attic square tower with turrets - prototype of Fraser? Precious survival in being almost continuously uninhabited from 1842 to 1977, although kept wind- and watertight. 18th-century interiors, particularly c.1733 panelling, intact, including the elegant 1796 dining room. Anciently, Ballogie, one of sublime family of Bell châteaux in Gordon - Cluny, Fraser, Craigievar, Pittfichie(?), Lickleyhead - characterised by sure-footed massing of blocks, lightness and airyness of upperworks. Squinch arch at level of corbel table of main block carries upper part of stair of great bedroom stack: all remarkably spare and light for its bulk, eschewing the exuberance of the upperworks of Fraser. Recalcitrance of George Gordon of Midmar and Abergeldie (Deeside) at nearby Battle of Corrichie led to forfeiture of land, 1562. It was restored three years later and G Bell worked from 1565 to his death 10 years later. Lower floors at least hint of the earlier tower (gunloops) destroyed by Mary; attacked again, 1594, after Gordon defeat at Glenlivet. Repairs post-1602. In 1728 bought by Alexander Grant and became known as Grantsfield: 1730 remodelling, two low wings added to north (north-west wing probably 17th century judging by stone dormer-heads) to create small courtyard, terraced owing to fall of land (cf contemporary work at Castle Grant, Grantown on Spey). Restored for dwelling, 1977-80 (Shepherd 1994, 156-7).
- 2.10 Early maps show that the area of the proposed trench was within a graveyard form at least the mid 19th century (Illus 3-4).

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was maintained on 11-13 September 2017. Three trenches were excavated by SSE staff and a watching brief maintained. All trenches were for a new electricity supply running alongside the existing supply cables.



Illus 2 Site plan showing watching brief areas (*copyright SSE*)

Trench 1 was 1.5m wide and excavated to the level of the subsoil. The plough soil was 0.2m deep and the subsoil was contact sand and gravels. There were plough scores in the natural subsoil (Illus 3).

Trench 2 was dug within the mature trees on the N side of the graveyard. The subsoil was loose light brown sand and the topsoil was 0.1m deep. It was light, dry, rooty loam.

Trench 3 was dug on the E side of the path (under which the existing electric supply runs). The N end of this trench had 0.2m topsoil in top of compact sand natural; the S end of the trench had 0.5m topsoil on top of sand subsoil. The section between the lawn and the church had been excavated previously and consisted of made up layers of soil and gravel.

No archaeological finds or features were identified in any trench and the trenches have now been backfilled.



Illus 3 Trench 1 showing compact sand natural subsoil with plough marks; facing E



Illus 4 Trench 2 showing shallow, dry, rooty topsoil; facing SW



Illus 5 Trench 3 showing sandy natural subsoil; the existing electric supply is under the path (right); facing S

4 REFERENCES

Shepherd, I. A G. 1994 *Gordon: an illustrated architectural guide*. Edinburgh.

Shepherd, I. A. G. 1996 *Aberdeen and North-East Scotland, Exploring Scotland's Heritage series*, ed. by Anna Ritchie. 2nd. Edinburgh.

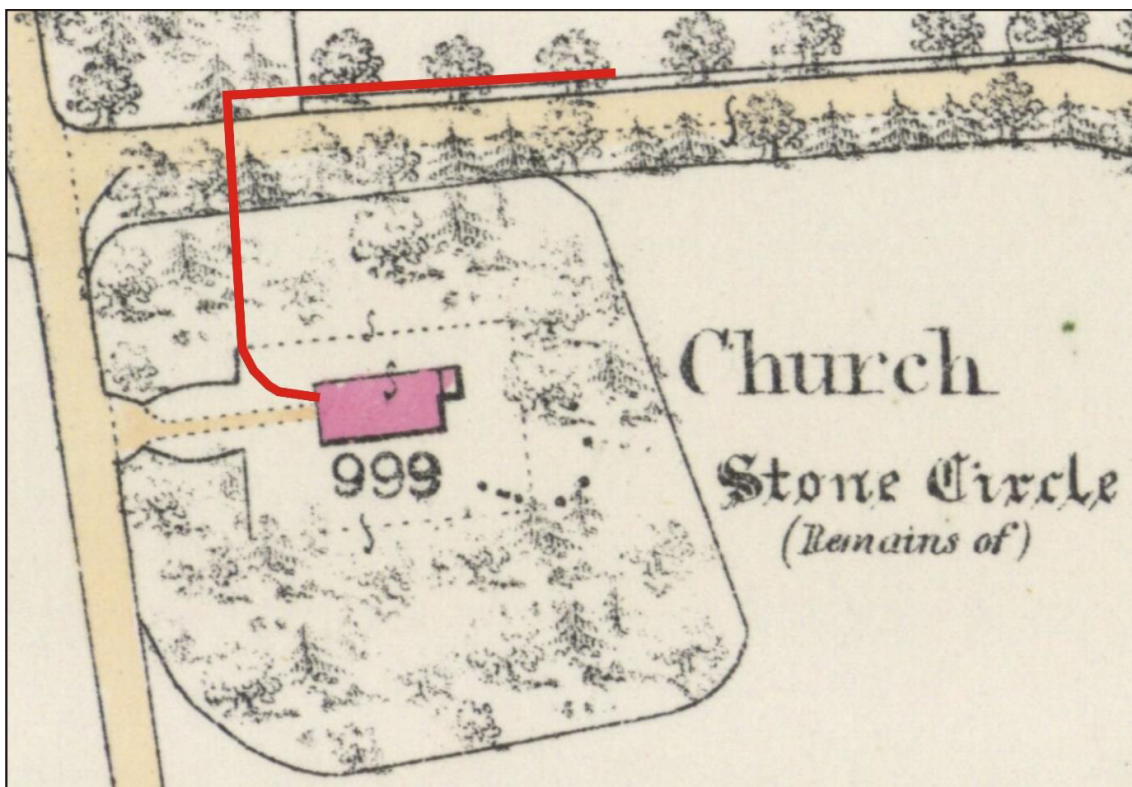
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5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

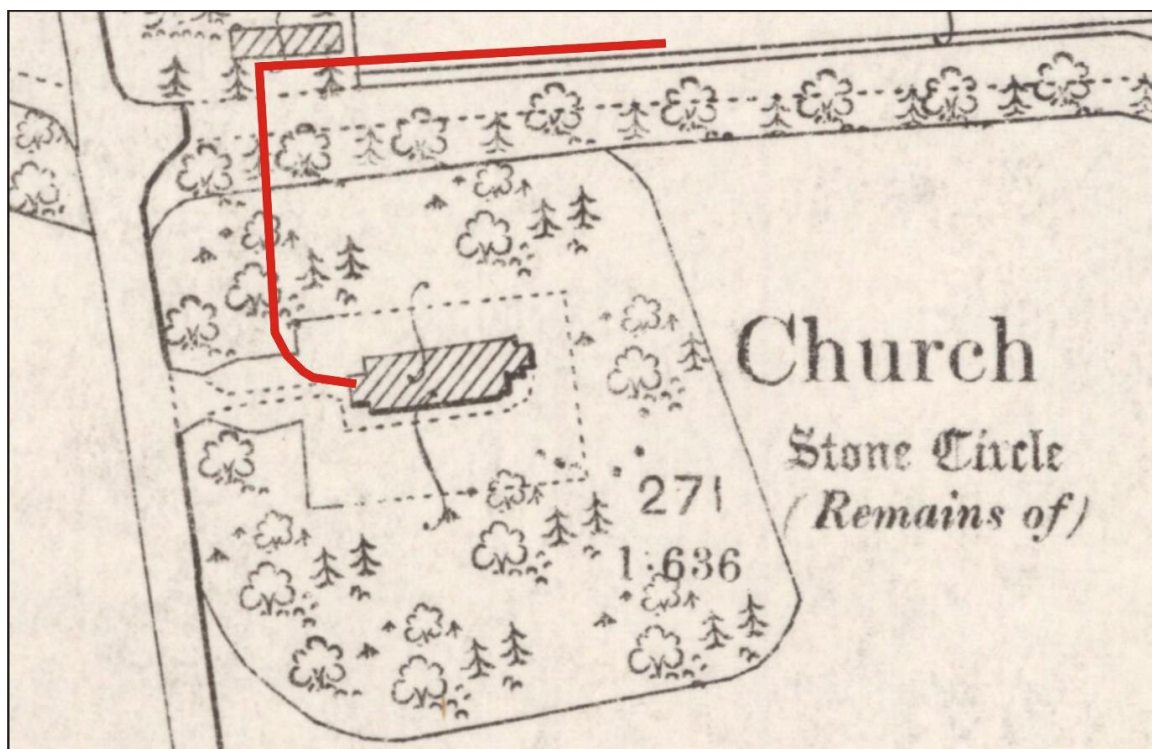
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APPENDIX 1 MAPS



Illus 6 First Edition OS map showing proposed trench location in red (*copyright National Library of Scotland*) Aberdeen Sheet LXXIII.9 (Midmar) Survey date: 1865 Publication date: 1869



Illus 7 Second Edition OS map showing proposed trench location in red (*copyright National Library of Scotland*) Aberdeenshire 073.09 (includes: Midmar) Publication date: 1900 Revised: 1899

APPENDIX 2 PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo No	Description	Facing
DSC_2514-16	Tr2	SW
DSC_2518	Tr2	NNE
DSC_2520-22	Tr2	SW
DSC_2523-24	Tr2	NNE
DSC_2526	Tr2	SW
DSC_2527-29	Tr2	NNE
DSC_2530-36	Tr2 N end crossing existing electric cable	NNE
DSC_2537-41	Tr3 N end	S/SSE
DSC_2542	Tr3 N end	E
DSC_2543-48	Tr3 N end showing stone circle in background	SE/SSE
DSC_2544-60	Tr3 N end	S/N
DSC_2563-70	Tr3 N end	NW/NNW/N/SSE
DSC_2571-4	Tr2 N end crossing existing electric cable	NNE
DSC_2575-8	Tr1 W end showing plough scars in natural	E
DSC_2579-83	Tr3 central section	S/SE/SSE
DSC_2585-6	Tr1 completed showing plough scars in natural	E/W
DSC_2587-9	Tr3 S end in lawn	S/E
DSC_2590-1	Tr3 S end in lawn	SE
DSC_2592-4	Tr3 S end in lawn	N
DSC_2595-2604	Tr3 S end under gravel around church showing existing electric cable and 2 ceramic drain pipes	E/NE
DSC_2605	Tr3 S end under gravel around church (left)	E



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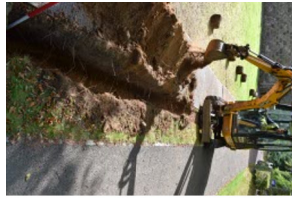
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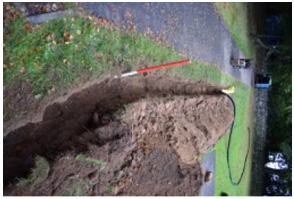
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