

**Land at High Street, St Combs, Aberdeenshire, AB43 8YU  
Data Structure report (DSR)  
Aberdeenshire Planning application APP/2017/0016**



**Alison Cameron  
Cameron Archaeology Ltd  
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## CONTENTS

1	BACKGROUND .....	3
2	ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND .....	4
3	ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION .....	5
4	THE LITHIC ASSEMBLAGE .....	8
4.1	INTRODUCTION .....	8
4.2	THE FINDS .....	8
4.3	CONCLUSION.....	8
5	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	9
6	REFERENCES.....	9
7	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	9
	APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES HES AND HER .....	10
	APPENDIX 2 MAPS.....	10
	APPENDIX 3 PHOTOGRAPHS .....	13

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Cover: Trench 1; facing N

Illus 1	Location plan .....	3
Illus 2	Plan showing trenches excavated.....	5
Illus 3	SF2 Trench 2 topsoil.....	6
Illus 4	Gateposts F2; facing S.....	7
Illus 5	Gatepost F3; facing SW .....	7
Illus 6	Pont's map of c1583-92 with St Combs Church circled in red .....	10
Illus 7	Gordon's map of c1636-52 with St Combs Church circled in red .....	11
Illus 8	Moll's map of 1745 with St Combs circled in red .....	11
Illus 9	First Edition OS map showing site outline in red.....	12
Illus 10	Second Edition OS map showing site outline in red.....	12
Illus 11	Third Edition OS map showing site outline in red.....	13

## SUMMARY

A 5% archaeological evaluation was carried out on 22 October 2019. The evaluation produced two pieces of flint but no archaeological features or deposits were recorded. This is an area affected by agricultural activity and although this small assemblage suggests that somewhere within the surrounding area there must be the remains of a prehistoric settlement where lithic implements were made and used, it is recommended that no further archaeological work is required during the current development.

# 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The site (Illus 1) is located on the SW side of St Combs. It is centred on NGR NK 04872 62966, at 15-25m OD in the parish of Lonmay.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by Chris Forman, Claymore Homes. An application APP/2019/1364 for Erection of 3 Dwellinghouses was approved on 18.12.18. Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service required a 5-7% archaeological evaluation which produced 2 lithics which are reported on here.
- 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 2020)

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Historic Environment Record (HER) and Canmore (HES) were consulted online within 1km of the proposed development.

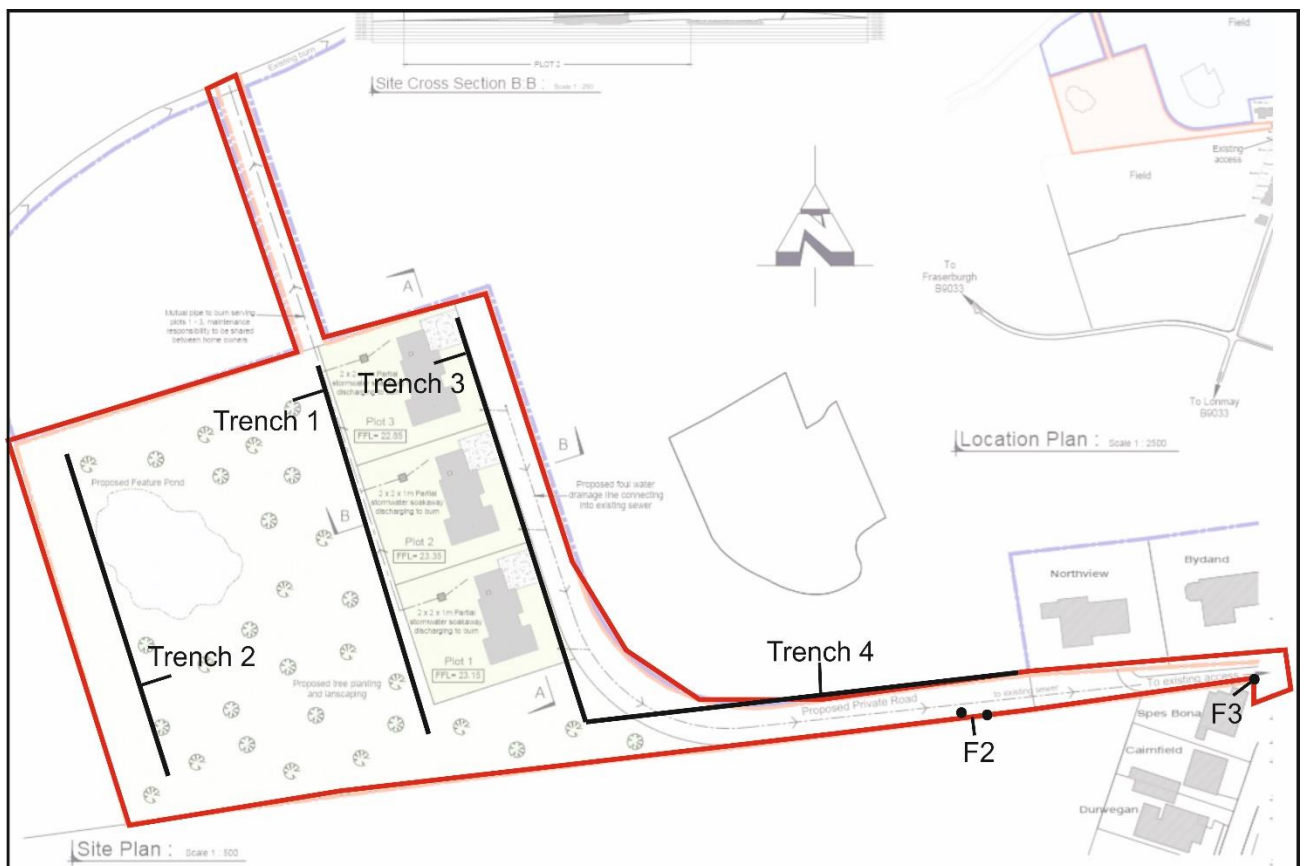
- 2.1 There is one Scheduled Monument within 1km of the proposed development. The medieval church of St Combs (St Columba; SMR NK06SE0001) was abandoned in 1608 when a new church was built 2 miles further inland. All that remains is part of the W gable, pierced by a small square-headed window and a fragment of the N wall. Some 18th and a few early 19th Century gravestones survive in the churchyard (MacGibbon and Ross 1896-7, Vol 3, 587; Scott et al 1951-61, Vol 6, 228).
- 2.2 Village of St. Combs (SMR NK06SE0004), which is said to have been founded in the mid 1780s by Charles Gordon of Cairness in competition to the village of Boatlea which was at that time owned by a neighbouring Laird. The village largely consists of typical fishermen's houses, which are laid out in a series of parallel streets. The buildings are generally 1-storey and attic, 4-roomed rubble cottages. Traditionally, the cottages were built gable-on to the sea to shelter them from bad weather. By the year 1820's the village had three or four rows of houses, which was built on flatter ground. In the year 1830's a school was built. This was previously the old common ground. This school continued until the late 1880's and was then used as a dwelling house.
- 2.3 The remains of rectangular enclosure on the SE side of the village, was at one time thought to have been the remains of a Roman camp (SMR NK06SE0006). The enclosure is situated in a sheltered hollow, its longer axis N/S with banks 0.91m high. This is a completely indefensible position, ruling out its use as a Roman Camp. It is almost certainly associated with the 19th Century brickworks. According to local information bricks were found in quantity when the enclosed area was ploughed a few years ago. The name 'Camp Hill' is not known locally. A rectangular enclosure is depicted at this location on the OS map of 1867 but not on the 1888 edition.
- 2.4 There was a windmill (SMR NK06SE0023) to the S of the proposed development (Donnachie and Stewart 1967, 276-9).
- 2.5 There is an area of rig and furrow showing as cropmarks on the S side of the village (SMR NK06SE0008) on the 1st and 2nd edition OS maps. There are farmsteads in the surrounding area including Cairnglass (SMR NK06SW0101) and Overton of Inverallochy (SMR NK06SW0040).
- 2.6 Remains of a WWII five-sided pillbox with five gun emplacements (SMR NK06SE0017).
- 2.7 There are the remains of a shipwreck that was possibly sunk in WWII (SMR NK06SE0011). There are several more offshore according to local tradition.
- 2.8 Whitelinks Bay is the site of an aircraft crash site (SMR NK06SE0012). During World War II, a Spitfire crash landed in the bay. The pilot, Flight Sgt Richardson, was killed on impact.
- 2.9 There is a circular crop mark visible on a vertical aerial photograph taken in 1974 (SMR NK06SW0070). There is a thin outer circular trace, within which the area is lighter than the surrounding ground. There is also what appears to be an almost

central dark blob, which could suggest a burial pit. This crop mark may represent the remains of a ploughed out barrow.

2.10 The early maps (Illus 3-5), OS maps (Illus 6-8) and the 1942 aerial photograph (Illus 9) show that this area has been farmland.

### 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

A 5% archaeological evaluation was carried out on 22 October 2019. Four trenches were excavated (Illus 2). A tracked 15-ton machine with 2m ditching bucket was used for the work. Four trenches were excavated totaling 5% of the proposed development.



Illus 2 Plan showing trenches excavated (copyright Claymore Homes)

#### Trench 1

Trench 1 was 100m long oriented NNW-SSE along the W side of the proposed three houses. This trench contained 0.2-0.25m of ploughsoil on stoney clay natural subsoil with modern plough marks. One unworked flint was recovered from the topsoil but no other finds and no features were identified apart from the evidence of agricultural activity.

#### Trench 2

Trench 2 was 90m long on the W side of the proposed development in the area of the proposed feature pond and tree planting. This trench contained 0.4m of ploughsoil at the N end on stoney clay natural subsoil with modern plough marks. There was a palaeochannel filled with peat in the centre of the trench and a trench for a clay drainage pipe running NNW-SSE at the edge of the trench. One worked flint (Illus 3) was

recovered from the topsoil but no other finds and no features were identified apart from the evidence of agricultural activity.



Illus 3 SF2 Trench 2 topsoil

#### Trench 3

Trench 3 was 110m long oriented NNW-SSE along the E side of the proposed three houses. The S end of this trench had 0.35m of heavy clay ploughsoil on stoney clay subsoil. The centre of the trench had 0.25m of ploughsoil and the N end 0.15m of ploughsoil on very stoney clay. There were SW-NE furrows up to 1m wide and 0.1m deep in the centre of the trench; they were c6-8m apart. No finds and features were identified apart from the evidence of agricultural activity.

#### Trench 4

Trench 4 was 110m long oriented ENE-WSW along the N edge of the proposed new road. There was 0.5m of topsoil at the W end and 0.15m at the E end on a stoney clay subsoil. There were modern plough marks at the E end of the trench where the topsoil was shallower. There were NNW-SSE furrows up to 1m wide and 0.05m deep in the centre of the trench; they were c8-10m apart. No finds and features were identified apart from the evidence of agricultural activity.

Beehive shaped mortared stone gateposts F2 and F3 were photographically recorded on the S boundary of this field (Illus 2, 4-5).



Illus 4 Gateposts F2; facing S



Illus 5 Gatepost F3; facing SW

It is evident that the area has been wet in the past with palaeochannels and boggy areas surviving in the field.

## 4 THE LITHIC ASSEMBLAGE

*Torben Bjarke Ballin*

*LITHIC RESEARCH, Stirlingshire*

*Honorary Research Fellow, University of Bradford*

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2019, Cameron Archaeology carried out an evaluation of an area outside St Combs south-east of Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire (NGR: NK 04872 62966). Four trenches were excavated, revealing a palaeochannel, a ditch for a drainpipe, and modern plough furrows, but no prehistoric features were discovered. In addition, two pieces of worked flint were retrieved (Cameron 2019). The purpose of the present report is to briefly characterise, attempt to date, and discuss the lithic finds. In the report, the finds are referred to by their original SF numbers.

### 4.2 THE FINDS

#### Characterization

During the work at St Combs, the following two flint artefacts were recovered:

SF 1 Secondary *core rough-out* (37 x 22 x 33mm); fine-grained, honey-brown flint. The rough-out has a prepared crest along one lateral side, as well as a prepared platform with a trimmed edge at one end. The lateral side opposite the crest (the core's 'back-side') is cortical. Trench 1, NK 04919 62045.

SF 2 Tertiary bipolar? *flake with edge-retouch* (33 x 30 x 9mm); fine-grained, slightly corticated, mottled grey flint. The piece is defined as probably bipolar by its densely spaced ventral Wallner lines (or ripples). It appears that the thick bulbar area has been thinned by dorsal modification. The piece has some retouch along its right lateral side (probably to protect the user's fingers), as well as some use-wear along its left lateral side (probably from using the piece as a knife). Trench 2, NK 04825 62990.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The fact that this small assemblage includes a simple core as well as a tool with use-wear suggests that somewhere within the investigated area, there must be the remains of a prehistoric settlement of unknown size, where lithic implements were made and used. Neither artefact is diagnostic *sensu stricto*, and it is therefore only possible to suggest a very broad date within the framework Late Upper Palaeolithic to Early Iron Age period, or more or less the entire Scottish prehistoric period. Neither flint requires illustration.



## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation produced two pieces of flint but no archaeological features or deposits were recorded. This is an area affected by agricultural works and although this small assemblage includes a simple core as well as a tool with use-wear suggests that somewhere within the investigated area there must be the remains of a prehistoric settlement where lithic implements were made and used, it is recommended that no further archaeological work is required during the current development.

## 6 REFERENCES

**Cameron, A.** 2019: *Land at High Street, St Combs, Aberdeenshire, AB43 8YU*. Data Structure report. Unpublished report.

**Donnachie and Stewart, I L and N K.** (1967) '*Scottish windmills: an outline and inventory*', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, vol. 98, 1964-6.

**MacGibbon and Ross, D and T.** (1896-7) '*The ecclesiastical architecture of Scotland from the earliest Christian times to the seventeenth century*', 3v. Edinburgh.

**Scott, H et al (eds..)** (1915-61) *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticae: the succession of ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation, Revision*. Edinburgh.

## 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

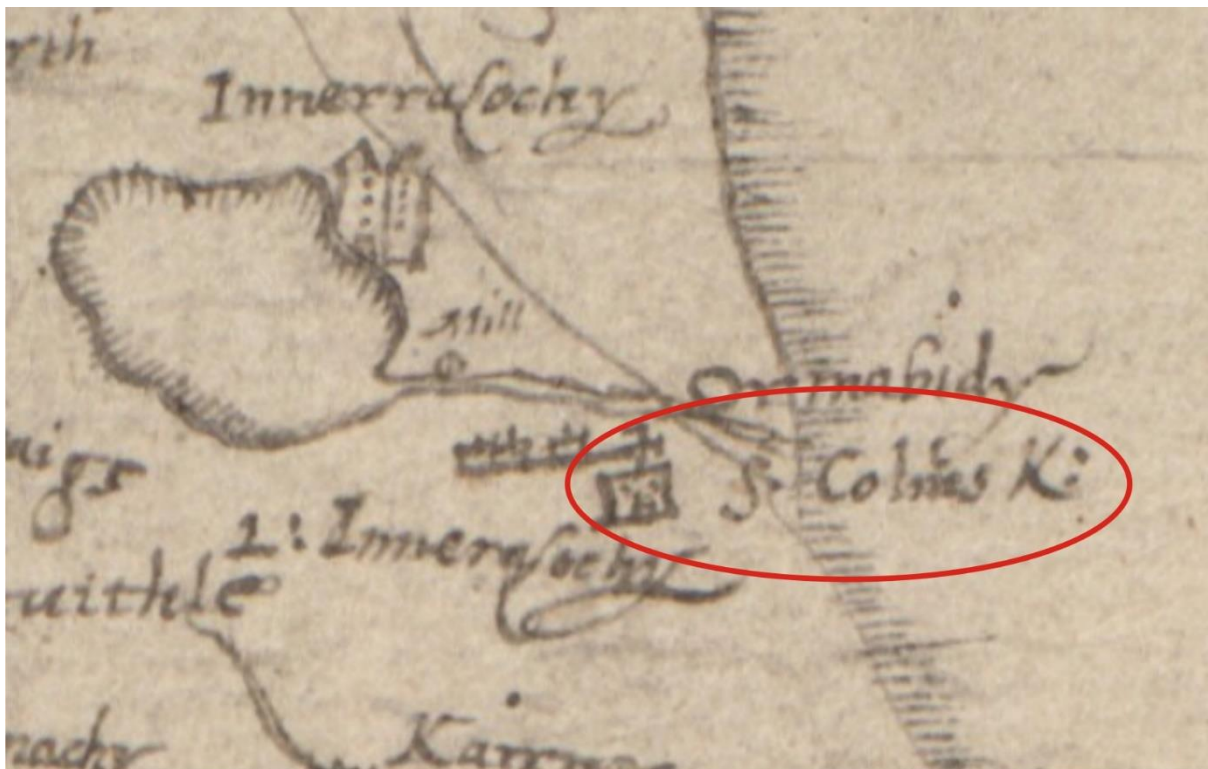
Thanks to Tiffany Kelly, Claymore Homes for initiating this project, Chris Forman, Colin McKinnon, Stevie and Neil all of Claymore Homes for their help on site and to Claire Herbert, Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service for her advice during this work.

Cameron Archaeology  
45 View Terrace  
Aberdeen  
AB25 2RS  
01224 643020  
07581 181057  
cameronarch@btinternet.com  
www.cameronarchaeology.com  
Company registration no 372223 (Scotland)  
VAT registration no 990 4373 00

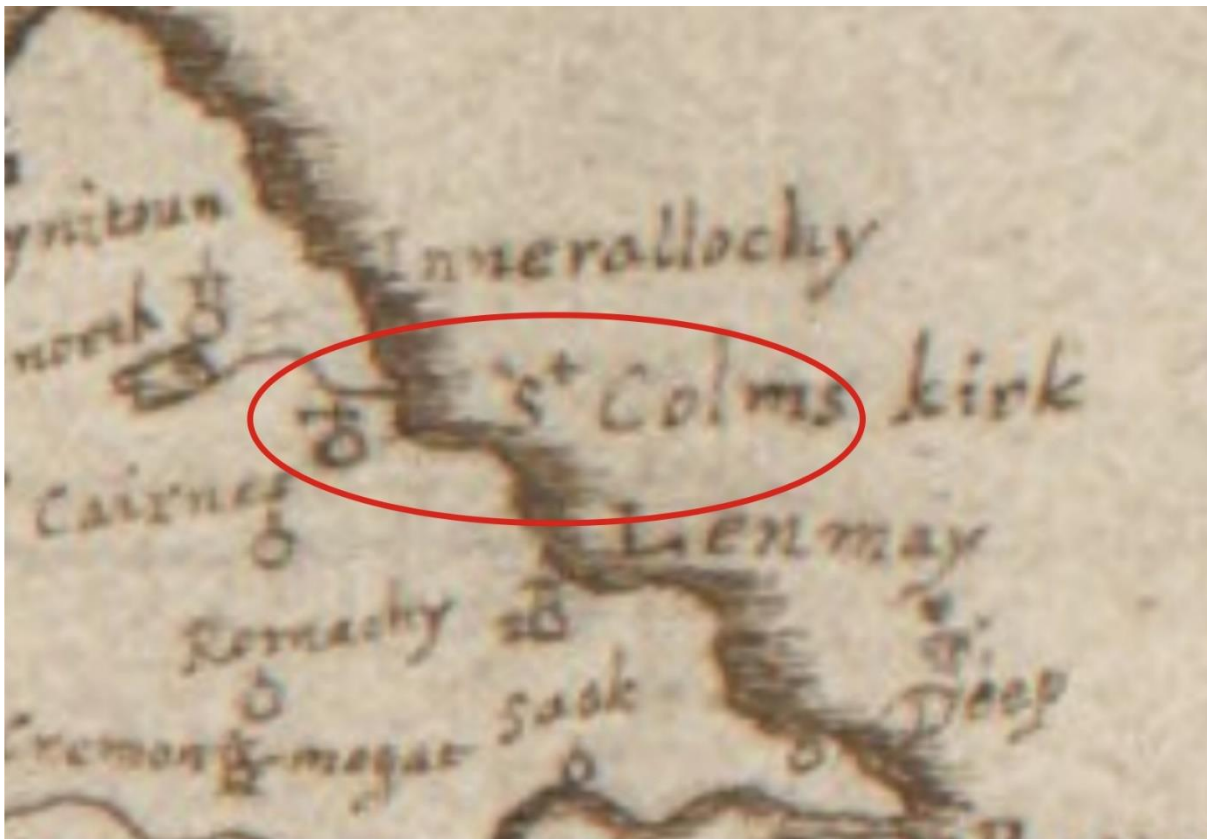
**APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SITES WITHIN 1KM OF THE PROPOSED SITE (Aberdeenshire HER online)**

Dataset UID	Name	Details
NK06SW0040	Overton Of Inverallochy	farmstead
NK06SW0070	Cairnglass	Circular crop mark
NK06SW0101	Cairnglass	farmstead
NK06SE0023	Botany View	Windmill
NK06SE0010	Corse Craig	harbour
NK06SE0004	St Combs	village
NK06SE0017	St Combs	pillbox
NK06SE0011	St Combs	shipwreck
NK06SE0012	Whitelinks Bay	Crash site
NK06SE0008	St Combs	Rig and furrow
NK06SE0001	St Columba's Church, St Combs	Church
NK06SE0006	St Combs	enclosure

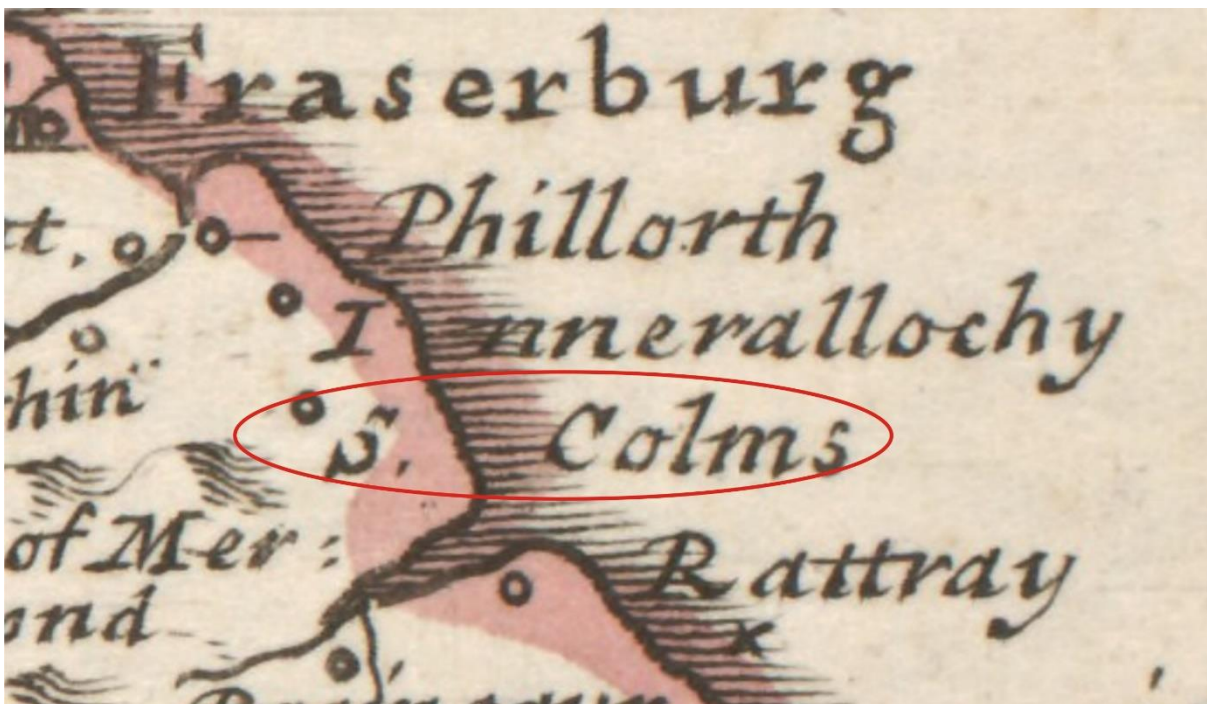
**APPENDIX 2 MAPS**



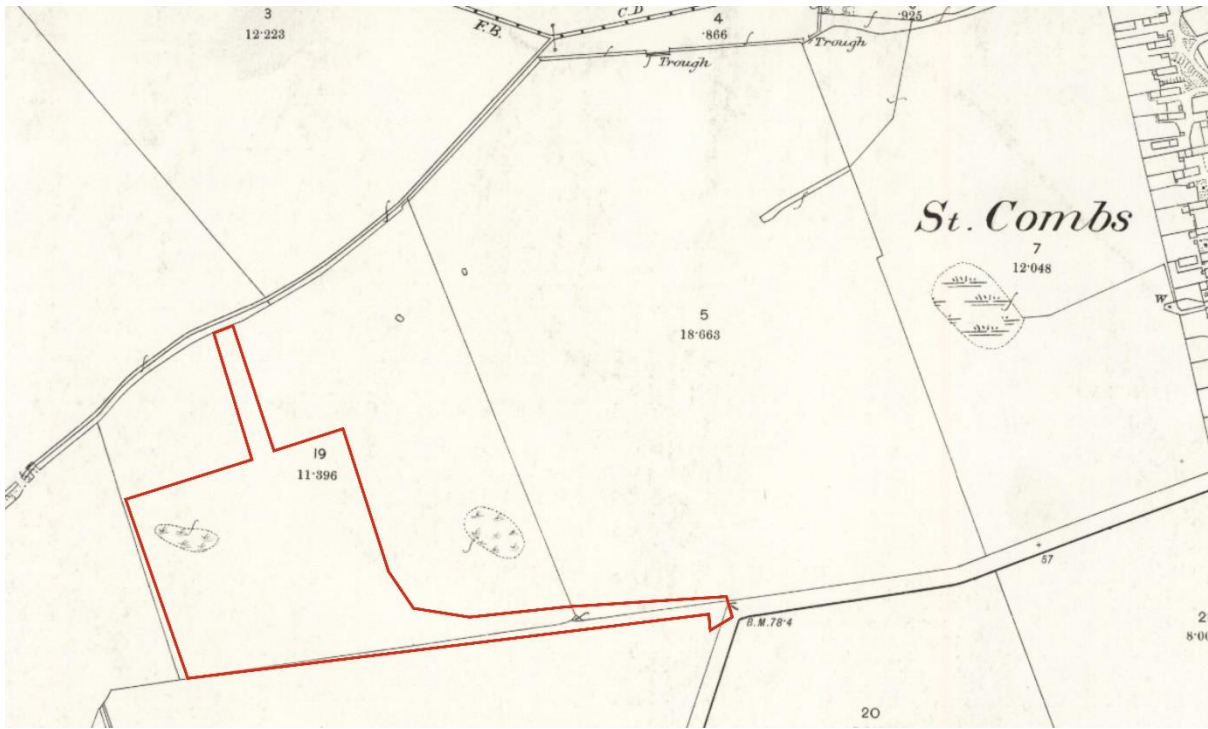
Illus 6 Pont's map of c1583-92 with St Combs Church circled in red (copyright National Library of Scotland)



Illus 7 Gordon's map of c1636-52 with St Combs Church circled in red (copyright National Library of Scotland)



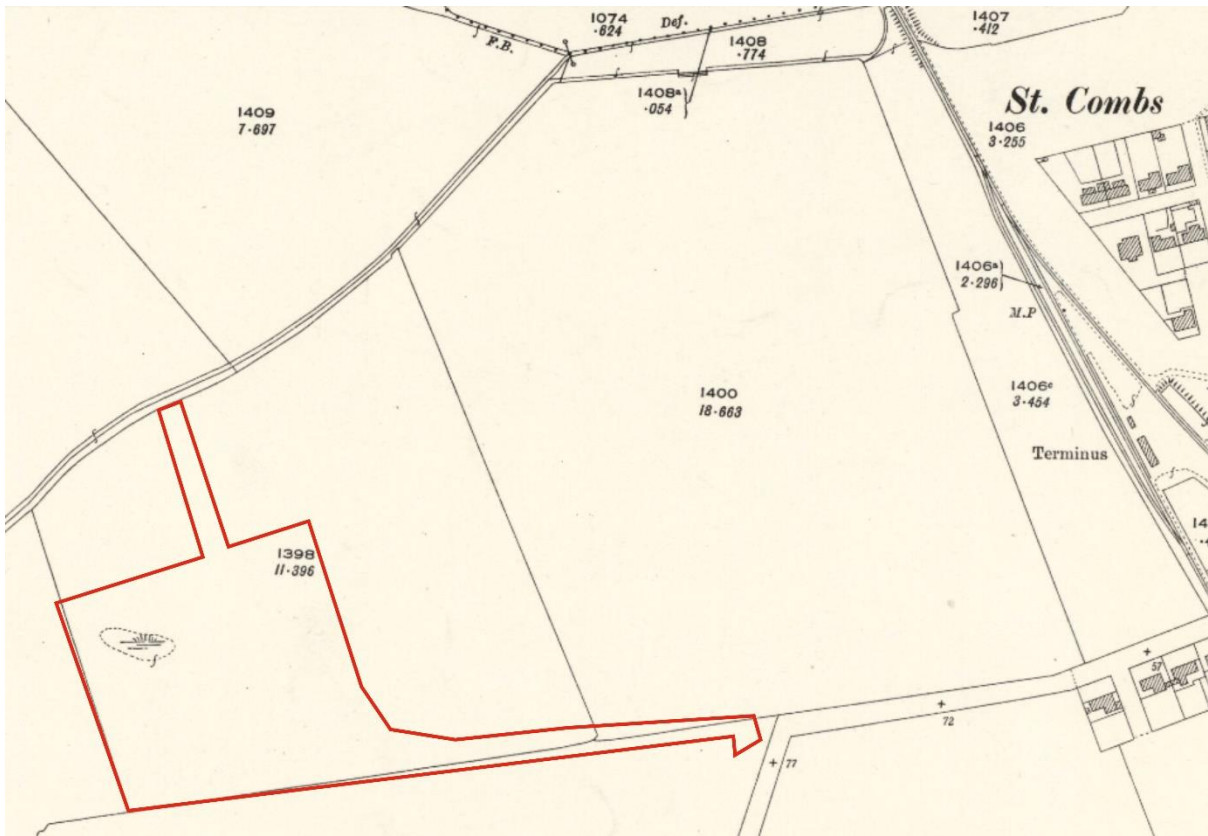
Illus 8 Moll's map of 1745 with St Combs circled in red (copyright National Library of Scotland)



Illus 9 First Edition OS map showing site outline in red showing boggy areas still extant (*copyright National Library of Scotland*) Aberdeenshire III.15 (Combined) Survey date: 1869 to 1870 Publication date: 1892



Illus 10 Second Edition OS map showing site outline in red (*copyright National Library of Scotland*) Aberdeenshire III.15 (Lonmay; Rathen) Publication date: 1902 Revised: 1900



Illus 11 Third Edition OS map showing site outline in red (*copyright National Library of Scotland*) Aberdeenshire III.15 (Lonmay; Rathen) Publication date: 1926 Revised: 1924 to 1925 Levelled: 1901

### APPENDIX 3 PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo no	Description	Facing
596-7	Tr1	N
598-99	Tr2 completed from Tr1 S end	W
600	Tr2 left Tr 1 right	N
601	Tr 2	N
602-3	Tr 2, 1	ENE/E
604	Tr3 completed	N
605-6	Tr 4 W end	NW
607-613	F2	S
614	Tr4 completed	W
5041-2	Tr2 SF2	
5055-6	F3	S/SW



DSC\_0596



DSC\_0597



DSC\_0598



DSC\_0599



DSC\_0600



DSC\_0601



DSC\_0602



DSC\_0603



DSC\_0604



DSC\_0605



DSC\_0606



DSC\_0607



DSC\_0608



DSC\_0609



DSC\_0610



DSC\_0611



DSC\_0612



DSC\_0613



DSC\_0614



IMG\_5041



IMG\_5042



IMG\_5055



IMG\_5056