

**Land to the North Of Upper Cairns, Memsie,
Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire**

Data Structure Report (DSR)

Aberdeenshire Planning Application APP/2016/3094



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Cover: S end of soil strip; facing NW

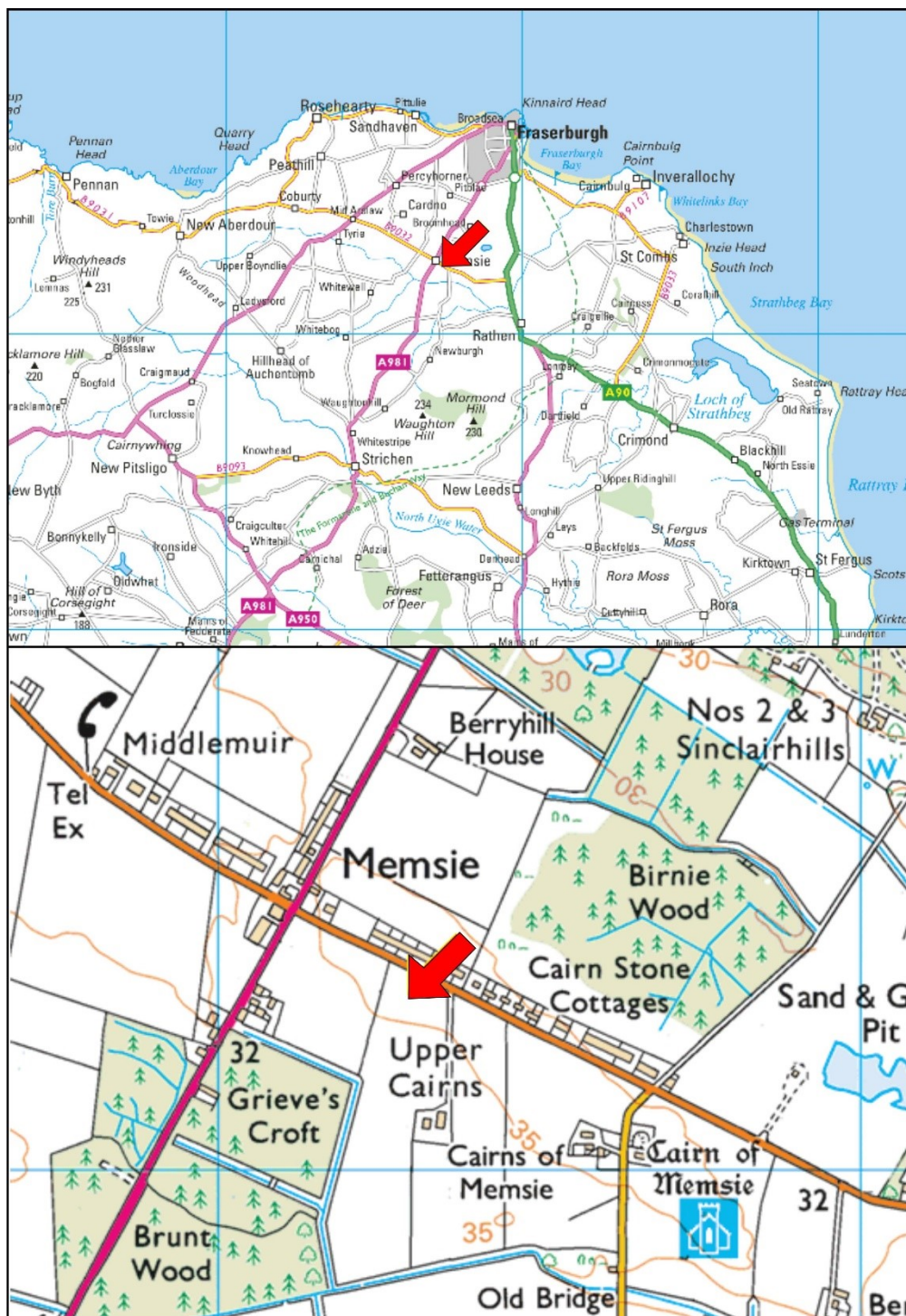
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SUMMARY

A monitored soil strip was carried out on 29 June 2021. The topsoil was stony sand 10-20cm deep on stony sand natural subsoil. No archaeological finds or features were identified and it is recommended that no further archaeological work is required during the current planning application.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The site (Illus 1) is located S of the B9032 E of Memsie. It is centred on NGR NJ9729562272, at 35-40m OD in the parish of Rathen.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by Steven Rollo and Edwin Low, Abbey Homes. An application 2016/3094 for 3 houses was approved on 9 March 2017 with a condition requiring a monitored soil strip of Plot 2.
- 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 Policy Scotland (HEPS) 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 2021)

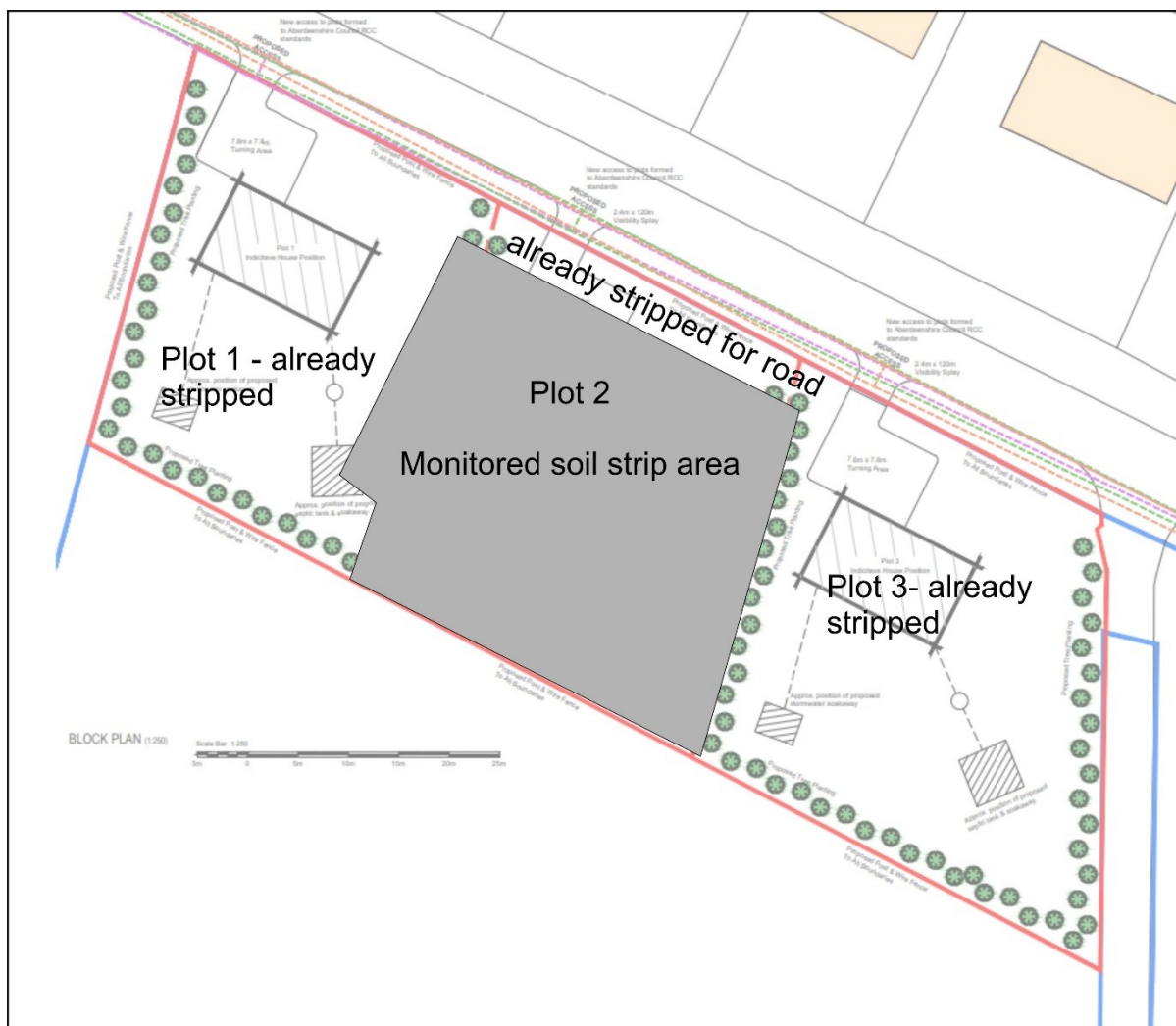
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

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: Cairn of Memsie (HER NJ96SE0001) is 0.35km ESE of the proposed development. The cairn, surviving as an impressive large sub-circular structure of bare stones, measuring 24 m in diameter and 4.4 m high. The cairn is the sole survivor of a cemetery of three large cairns clustered on the long low ridge of Cairn Muir and extant in the 18th century. In the 1740s the cairns were reported to be about 90m apart and originally circa 90 m in circumference and about 12m high. The other two cairns, and other smaller cairns in the vicinity, have long been destroyed (See [NJ96SE0027](#)). Antiquarian excavations recovered a beaker and a broken leaf-shaped bronze sword (although it is unclear whether antiquarian reports of excavations at Memsie refer to the surviving or one of the destroyed cairns). Also found were bones, a flint 'dart-head' and a 'little block of flint'. The cairn's plain, unadorned profile and absence of vegetation are typical of the larger Bronze Age cairns of the region. It is a rare survival in an intensively farmed area where much of the archaeology has been destroyed or ploughed flat (Shepherd 1996, 149, 1986, 143).
- 2.2 The proposed development is completely within the HER site NJ96SE0008, Upper Cairns a cairnfield and site of short cist. A short cist was found in 1954 whilst cutting a trench to Upper Cairns, circa 183 m (200 yards) west northwest of the cairns of Memsie, on the west side of the track to Upper Cairns, about 1.21 m below the ground surface. There was no cap-stone but pockets of carbonised wood on the top suggest it may have had a wooden lid. The cist was filled with earth among which were found some beaker sherds. In the same field there are pits showing as cropmarks and several possible ring ditches. This suggests that this is part of a larger cairnfield which includes Memsie cairn and the other two cairns (Clarke 1970, 511; Kirk and McKenzie 1956, 1-14).
- 2.3 To the E of the proposed development is Cairn Muir (HER NJ96SE0027) the site of two large cairns, originally of a group of three which includes the extant cairn [NJ96SE0001](#), and which were spaced c 100 yards apart and associated with many small cairns. One was dug into at its centre before 1780. Only human bones were found though many of the stones at the centre were burnt, almost to vitrification. In the foundation of the other were discovered an urn reported to have contained calcined bones. The urn is medieval (NMA) although according to J Gordon who gave it to the museum in 1827 nothing was found in the urn. There were also several human skulls and a short sword lying beside the urn. The sword was 'one-edged, a brass hilt and iron blade enclosed in a wooden scabbard'. There is no record of a sword or bones in the museum. No further information. At the positions indicated there are circular enclosures or ring ditches showing as cropmarks, one more prominent than the other, so features may still survive in the area.
- 2.4 On the N side of Muir Road is Birnie Wood (HER NJ96SE0018) containing the remains of stone clearance heaps across an area of c 12ha which are visible on a vertical aerial photograph. They have deteriorated between 1976 and 1988. Their current condition is unknown.
- 2.5 The land has been in agricultural use in the recent past (Illus 3-5).

3 THE MONITORED SOIL STRIP

A monitored soil strip was carried out on 29 June 2021; Plots 1 and 3 had already been stripped and building commenced leaving only Plot 2 and a strip on the SE edge of Plot 1 unstripped (Illus 2). The topsoil was stony sand 10-20cm deep on stony sand natural subsoil. Soil had been dumped on the site recently, but the majority of the topsoil was shallower than a modern plough depth (Illus 3). No archaeological finds or features were identified and it is likely that if archaeological features had been sited within the boundary of this development, they would have been removed in the past by agricultural practices.



Illus 2 Plan showing area of monitored soil strip (copyright Ecotech Architecture)



Illus 3 Monitored soil strip progressing; facing SE

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A monitored soil strip was carried out on 29 June 2021. The topsoil was stony sand 10-20cm deep on stony sand natural subsoil. No archaeological finds or features were identified and it is recommended that no further archaeological work is required during the current planning application.

5 REFERENCES

Clarke, D L. (1970) *Beaker pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2v. Cambridge.

Kirk and Mckenzie, W and J. (1956) 'Three Bronze Age cist burials in NE Scotland', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, vol. 88, 1954-6.

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

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6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Steven Rollo and Edwin Low, Abbey Homes for initiating this project and to Claire Herbert, Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service for her advice during this work.

APPENDIX 1

Archaeological and historical sites within 1km of the proposed site (HES and Aberdeenshire HER online)

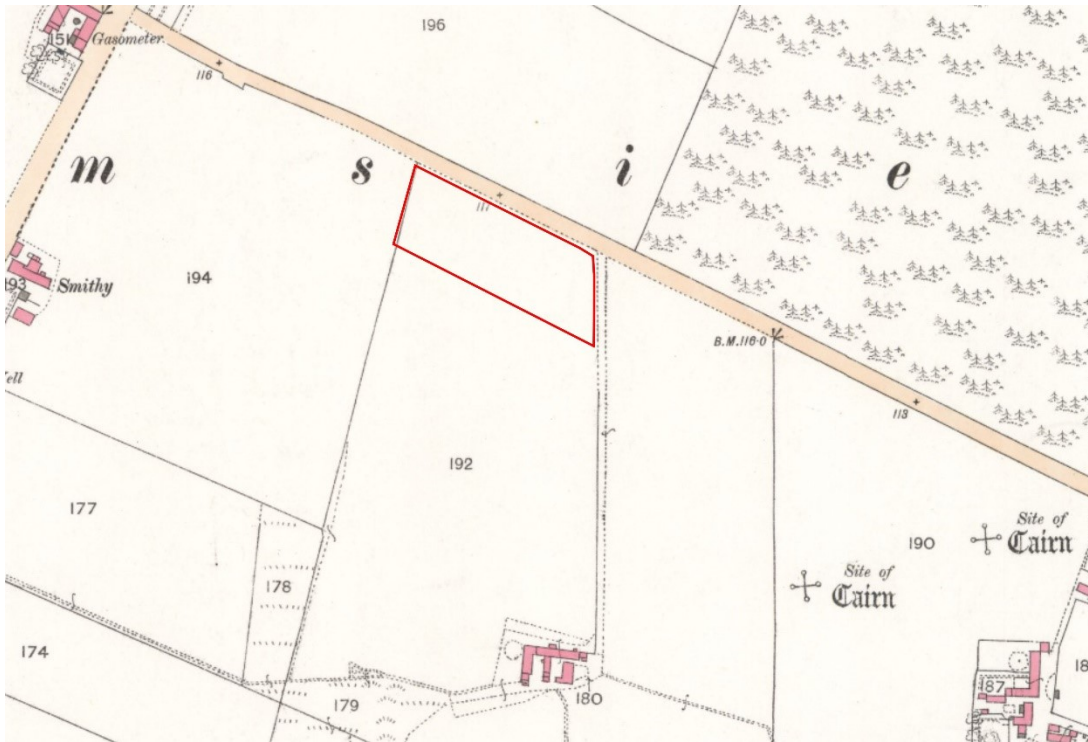
HER

Dataset	Dataset UID	Name
HERABER	NJ96SE0008	Upper Cairns
HERABER	NJ96SE0059	Muirton Of Memsie
HERABER	NJ96SE0001	Memsie Cairn
HERABER	NJ96SE0027	Cairn Muir
HERABER	NJ96SE0018	Birnie Wood
HERABER	NJ96SE0058	Nether Cairns
HERABER	NJ96SE0088	Berrymill
HERABER	NJ96SE0087	Cairnmuir
HERABER	NJ96SE0093	Muirton Of Memsie
HERABER	NJ96SE0102	Berryhill House
HERABER	NJ96SE0080	Old Bridge Of Memsie
HERABER	NJ96SE0005	Old Bridge Of Memsie
HERABER	NJ96SE0052	Manor Farm
HERABER	NJ96SE0009	Memsie
HERABER	NJ96SE0058	Nether Cairns

HES

Dataset	Dataset UID	Name	OS NGR	Classification
Canmore	20807	Upper Cairns	NJ 97350 62160	CIST (PERIOD UNASSIGNED), BEAKER
Canmore	178810	Manor Farm	NJ 97170 61610	FARMSTEAD (PERIOD UNASSIGNED)
Canmore	75008	Birnie Wood	NJ 97700 62400	CLEARANCE CAIRN(S) (PERIOD UNASSIGNED)
Canmore	20804	Cairns Of Memsie	NJ 97660 62046	CAIRN(S) (PREHISTORIC), CINERARY URN (BRONZE AGE), SWORD (IRON)(MEDIÉVAL), UNIDENTIFIED FLINT(S) (FLINT)(PREHISTORIC)
Canmore	179112	Old Bridge Of Memsie	NJ 97628 61818	ROAD BRIDGE (PERIOD UNASSIGNED)
Canmore	20815	Cairns Of Memsie	NJ 97560 61850	DOVECOT (PERIOD UNASSIGNED)
Canmore	259948	Muirton Of Memsie	NJ 96540 62460	ENCLOSED CREMATION CEMETERY (BRONZE AGE)(POSSIBLE)
Canmore	299374	Berryhill House	NJ 97315 62668	FARMSTEAD (PERIOD UNASSIGNED), WHIN MILL (POST MEDIÉVAL)
Canmore	272993	Muirton Of Memsie	NJ 96500 62400	ENCLOSED CREMATION CEMETERY (BRONZE AGE)(POSSIBLE)
Canmore	156477	Muirton Of Memsie	NJ 96360 62210	FARMSTEAD (PERIOD UNASSIGNED)
Canmore	20809	Memsie	NJ 97000 62000	CAIRN (PERIOD UNASSIGNED), BEAKER, SWORD (BRONZE)

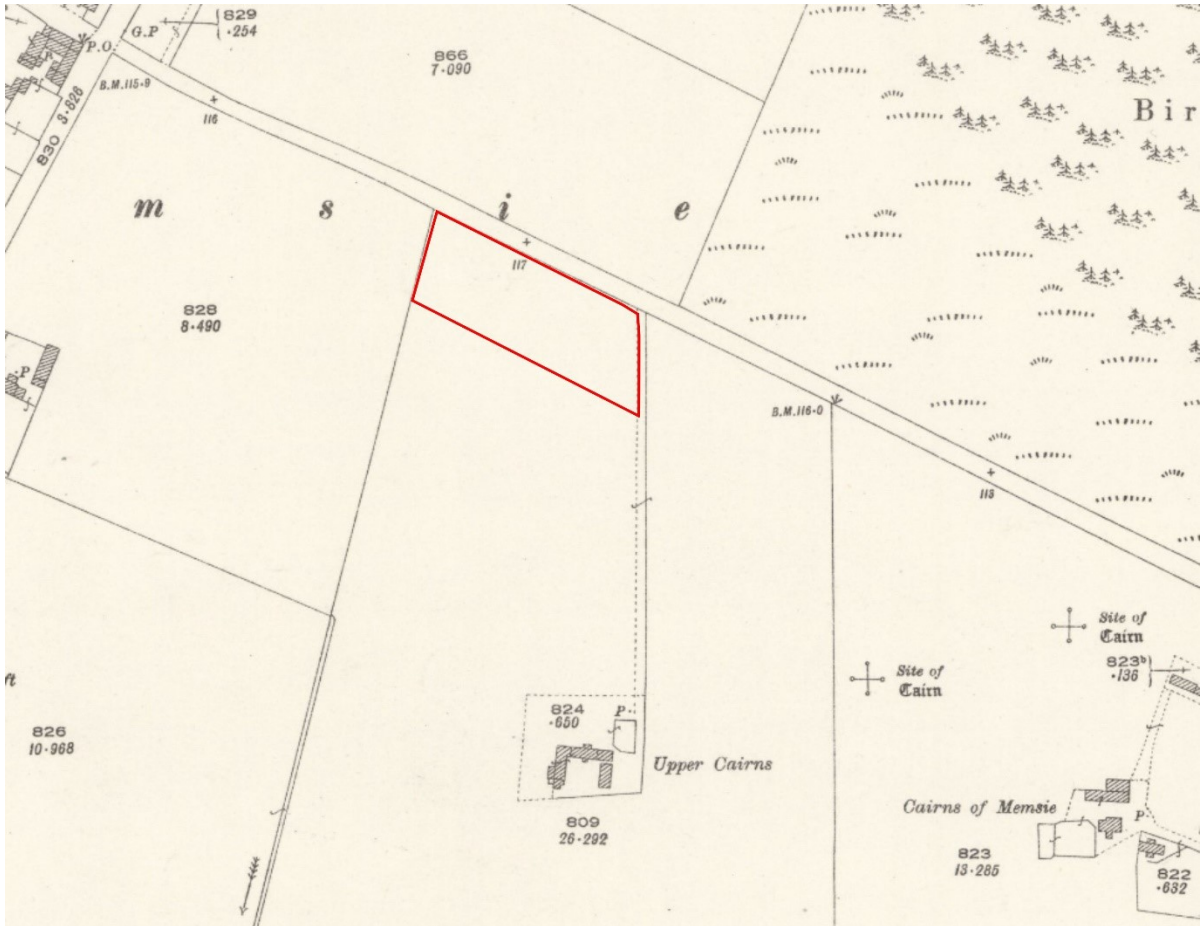
APPENDIX 2 MAPS



Illus 3 First Edition OS map showing site outlined in red (copyright National Library of Scotland) Aberdeenshire II.16 (Combined) Survey date: 1868 to 1870 Publication date: 1899



Illus 4 Second Edition OS map showing site outlined in red (copyright National Library of Scotland) Aberdeenshire II.16 (Fraserburgh; Pitsligo; Rathen; Tyrie) Revised: 1900, Publication date: 1902



Illus 5 Third Edition OS map showing site outlined in red (*copyright National Library of Scotland*) Aberdeenshire II.16 (Fraserburgh; Pitsligo; Rathen; Tyrie)
 Revised: 1925, Publication date: 1926