

ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

# Archaeology in Applecross May 2012 Trial Trenching



# **Data Structure Report**

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## Contents

Cover photo: Excavation in progress, Trench 1 (left); recording in progress, Trench 3 (right)

List of	f Figures	2
List of	f Plates	2
1	Summary	3
2	Introduction	
	<ul><li>2.1 General information</li><li>2.2 Acknowledgements</li></ul>	3 3
3	Site location and background	
	<ul><li>3.1 Site location and geology</li><li>3.2 Archaeological and historical background</li></ul>	4 6
4	Objectives	7
5	Methodology	
	<ul><li>5.1 Site visits and geophysical survey</li><li>5.2 Trial trenching</li><li>5.3 Sampling and finds processing</li></ul>	8 8 8
6	Results	
	<ul> <li>6.1 Trench 1</li> <li>6.2 Trench 2</li> <li>6.3 Trench 3</li> </ul>	10 11 12
7	Discussion	14
8	Archiving and finds disposal	14
9	Reporting	16
10	References	17
Apper	ndix 1: List of Contexts	17
Apper	ndix 2: List of Features	18
Apper	ndix 3: List of Finds	18
Apper	ndix 4: List of Drawings	18
Apper	ndix 5: List of Samples	19
Appen	ndix 6: List of Photographs	19

# **List of Figures**

Figure 1	Landscape situation of Applecross	4
Figure 2	Location of the May 2012 trial trenching investigation	5
Figure 3	Results of the 2005 geophysical survey	7
Figure 4	Location of trenches excavated in May 2012	9
Figure 5	Trench 1, post-excavation	10
Figure 6	NE-facing profile of the SW edge of Trench 1	10
Figure 7	NW-facing profile of the SE edge of Trench 1	11
Figure 8	Trench 2, post-excavation, showing Features 2.01 and 2.02	11
Figure 9	Trench 3, post-excavation, showing the stone alignment (C306) and	
	Feature 3.01 (pit or ditch)	13
Figure 10	NE-facing section through Feature 3.01 ditch or pit of unknown use	14

## List of Plates

Plate 1	Trench 1, post-excavation, facing NW	11
Plate 2	Trench 2, post-excavation, facing SW, showing remains of wall,	
	Feature 2.01	12
Plate 3	Trench 3, post-excavation, facing SW, showing Feature 3.01	12
Plate 4	Trench 3 NE end, facing SW; Feature 3.01, after half-sectioning,	
	showing the compact stony fill of the cut extending outside of the trench;	
	inset: post-sectioning of Context 306	13

#### 1 Summary

This report presents the results of a community project aimed at instructing members of and visitors to the community on the fundamentals of setting out, excavating and recording archaeological trial trenches or test pits.

Local members of the community and campsite visitors, led by professional archaeologists excavated three trenches on the ridge northwest of the Iron Age site of Applecross Broch, excavated in 2006-2010. The trenches targeted an area of high resistance recorded by a geophysical survey by Wessex Archaeology during an investigation of the area by Time Team in 2005.

One trench revealed no archaeological features or finds, a second trench revealed the remains of the footing of probable boundary wall and the cut for a modern, but unrecorded, test pit and the third trench revealed a pit or ditch containing stone fill. The results indicated that the circular area of high resistance identified in the geophysical survey was likely of geological origin.

### 2 Introduction

#### 2.1 General information

The trial trenching exercise was one of the 2012 weekend community archaeology events planned under the Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme (ALPS), aimed at engaging the community and its visitors with the heritage of Applecross and for providing training in archaeological techniques.

The location of the trial trenching was selected based on the results of a geophysical survey conducted in 2005 by Wessex Archaeology during an investigation by *Time Team* of Applecross Broch, situated 40m to the southeast (Section **5.1**).

#### 2.2 Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following funders who provided financial support for the fieldwork and reporting: LEADER, the Scottish Government, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

We would like to thank the volunteers who participated in the fieldwork and the Applecross Campsite for its hospitality. We would also like to thank Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme (ALPS) and Catherine Dagg for commissioning the work. Fieldwork was led by Lynn Fraser and Mary Peteranna.

Mapping was reproduced courtesy of Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services, ProMap License No. LIG1044 and ESRI licensing.

#### **3** Site location and background

#### **3.1** Site location and geology

The village of Applecross is located on the western coast of the Applecross Peninsula in the northwest Highlands of Scotland (Figure 1). The small residential community is situated next to a natural harbour that opens into the Inner Sound of Skye and faces the Isle of Raasay and Isle of Skye to the west. The Sound of Skye borders Applecross to the north and west, and although Applecross is isolated from the adjoining mainland by mountainous terrain to east and southeast, its situation places it ideally along prehistoric sea routes.

The investigation focused on an area surveyed in 2005, centred on Ordnance Survey NGR NG 71153 44371, approximately 40m northwest of Applecross Broch. The trial trenching site was located on the northwestern end of a low ridge of glacially-formed material situated on the raised beach site of Applecross Campsite. The site is located at approximately 40m OD, less than 160 metres from the present coastline. Its location gives it an outstanding vantage point with a continuous viewshed arcing from southwest to northeast (Figure 2).

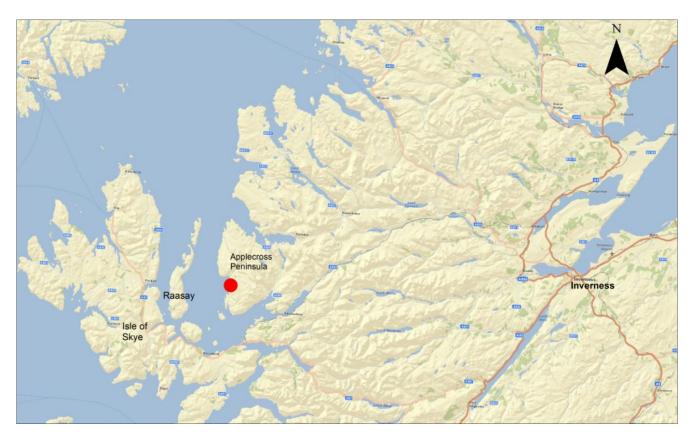


Figure 1 Landscape situation of Applecross<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Contains Ordnance Survey data Crown copyright and database rights (2012)

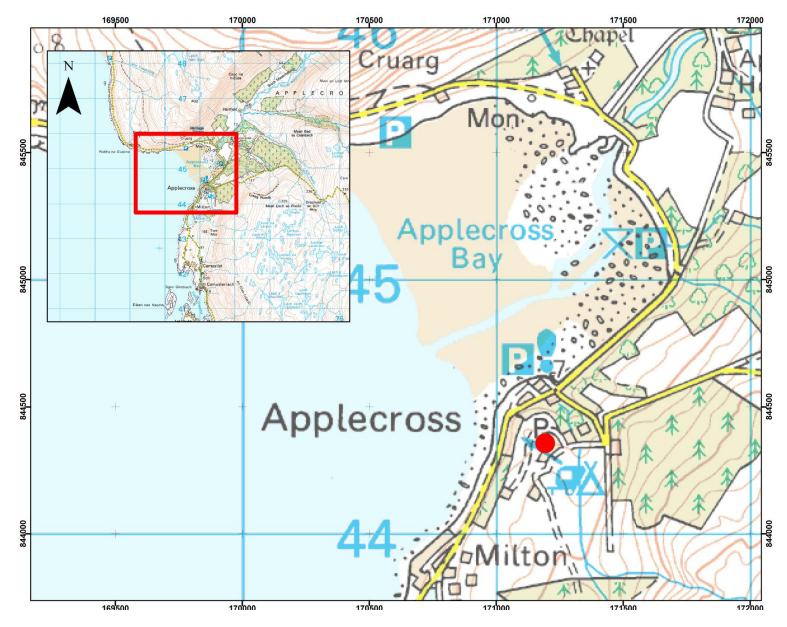


Figure 2 Location of the May 2012 trial trenching investigation

#### 3.2 Archaeological and historical background

- 3.2.1 Applecross, in Gaelic, *Abercrossan* mouth of the River Crossan, has another ancient name, *Comrich* or *Comaraich*—a Gaelic derivation meaning protection (MacQueen, 1792 and McRae, 1836). Applecross is well-known as being the centre for the foundation of an early Christian community in the early Medieval Period. In 673 AD, St. Maelrubha is believed to have founded a monastery (NMRS #NG74NW1) at the eastern end of Applecross Bay. It was later reported to have been raided by Vikings.
- 3.2.2 Recent excavations (2006-2010) at Applecross Broch (Highland Historic Environment Record No. MHG7680), located 40m southeast of the trial trenching investigation, have uncovered a complex multi-period Iron Age site. The main structure, built over and incorporating at least two earlier roundhouse-type buildings, was in use by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century with a final period of occupation sometime in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> to mid-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. The site was also built over an earlier stone-walled underground passage and a lintel-covered ditch passage attached to the southeast side of the building. A series of ditches and other features, including a metal-working hearth, a cist, postholes and pits were uncovered northwest of the main structure.

In the *Old Statistical Account of* 1791-99 (Vol. 3, 378-9), Rev. MacQueen may have described part of the site:

In the district of Applecross are the remains of a subterraneous house, of which there is still a part entire. It was of considerable length, four feet wide, and four feet deep, regularly faced with stone and covered with flags, which were overlaid with turf, so as to be on a level with the surrounding ground. The passage was at one of the ends, which, if covered with a turf or a bundle of heather, would elude all search. From the construction of these houses, it is more likely, that they were the receptacles of plunder, and the fences of real property, than the habitations of men. Near the house are the ruins of a Danish dun. All of the same description along the coast, served as so many centinels to the Western Isles, who, by the signal of a torch, could give an early intimation to their nearer insular friends, of any approaching danger, which being in like manner communicated from one Dun to another, the alarm would in a moment become general (MacQueen, 1792: 378-9).

At the time of the *OSA*, the site location was known as 'Borrodale', a Norse derivation for 'stronghold valley (Watson 1904).'

3.2.3 On the northwest side of Applecross Bay, a possible roundhouse settlement (Rubha na Guailne, Highland Historic Environment Record No. MHG7689) is located south of the rock shelter at Sand, which had been occupied from the Mesolithic through later prehistoric periods.

In the wider landscape, several rock shelters along the west coast of the Applecross peninsula, the islands to the south and Isle of Raasay to west contained occupation material dating throughout the Iron Age period (Hardy and Wickham-Jones, 2007). Dun Borrodale, an oval-shaped broch ruin, located on the western side of the south end of Raasay, is a close neighbour to Applecross across the Inner Sound of Skye.

3.2.4 The First Edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map does not depict the broch site, but does show a track and boundary dyke running across the centre of the broch ridge, connecting the Mains of Applecross to the village on the shoreline.

## 4 **Objectives**

- 4.1 The overall aims of the archaeology programme were:
  - To provide an opportunity for local people to experience and obtain training in archaeological techniques and gain an understanding of their local heritage
  - To encourage the widest possible inclusion of local people in the educational and practical benefits of the project
- 4.2 The specific objectives were:
  - To investigate an area of high resistance located during a geophysical survey and identified as possible archaeology by *Time Team* in 2005 (Figure **3**)
  - To provide training to volunteers in test pitting / trial trenching procedures, including: setting-out trenches, excavating, completing site records, recording techniques (photography, GPS, plan and section drawing), handling/recording of finds and sampling

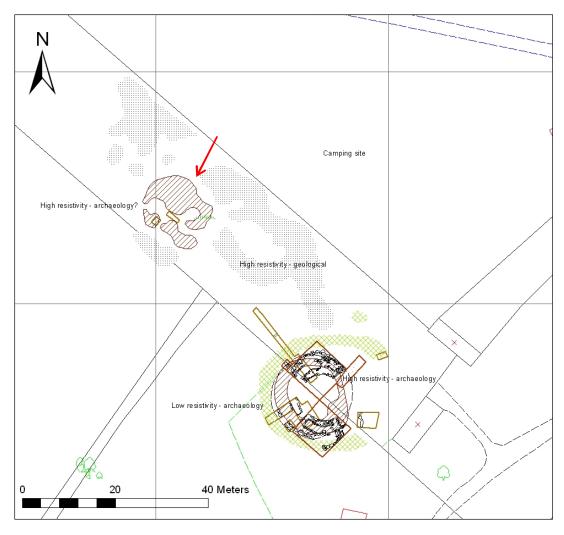


Figure 3 Results of the 2005 geophysical survey (trial trenching site in top left, broch site in bottom right)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Plan prepared by John Wood (Wood, *et al* 2008)

## 5 Methodology

#### 5.1 Site visit and geophysical survey

The geophysical survey conducted by Wessex Archaeology in 2005 was reviewed prior to fieldwork. The plan (Figure 3) suggested that an area of high resistance located approximately 40m northwest of the broch site may be an archaeological feature, possibly an Iron Age wheelhouse. Numerous prior site visits to the location, prior to the 2012 investigation, had been unable to identify any visible indication of the feature on the ground.

Aerial imagery and historical mapping of the trial trenching location were also consulted prior to fieldwork.

#### 5.2 **Trial trenching**

Three trenches were excavated during the investigation (Figure 4): Trench 1 (3m NW-SE by 1m) Trench 2 (3m NE-SW by 1m) and Trench 3 (3m NE-SW by 1m). Trench 3 was extended by 2m to NE and 0.5m to NW. Turf and topsoil was removed by spade and drawhoe and trench excavation completed by hand trowel.

Recording was undertaken using standard recording sheets, plan / section drawings, GPS and digital photography. Volunteers assisted in all aspects of the fieldwork, including setting-out of trenches, excavation, completion of recording sheets, plan/section drawing, digital photography, sampling and finds processing.

All work was conducted in accordance with the *Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Code of Conduct* (IfA, 2010)

#### 5.3 Sampling and finds processing

All finds and samples were recorded by trench number, context number and feature number.

Artefacts were cleaned and indexed following the fieldwork.



Figure 4Location of trenches excavated in May 2012

#### 6 **Results**

Note: The letter C in front of a number indicates a Context Number, for example C101 = Context 101, and the letter SF in front of a number indicates a Find Number, SF001 = Find 001.

#### 6.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 3m long NW-SE by 1m wide and sloped downhill gently from southwest to northeast. It was excavated over the northwest side of the area of high resistance, in order to target possible structural walling.

There were no archaeological features or finds recorded in the trench (Plate 1). The topsoil was 40-50cm deep and the subsoil (C103) was a pale orange sand interspersed with stones and moderately compact at the surface. It was pitted in places, probably from the natural movement of stones and some hollows were infilled with a possible slopewash deposit (C102) containing a small amount of charcoal flecks scattered throughout it (Figures 5-7).

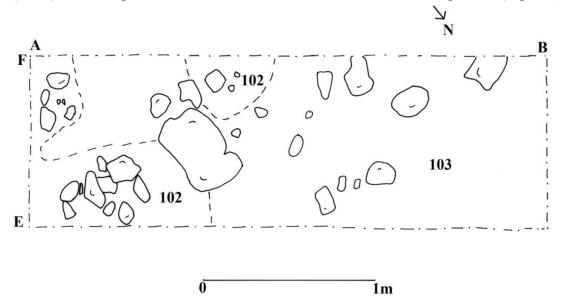


Figure 5 Trench 1, post excavation, showing the pitting in the subsoil infilled with a possible slopewash deposit (C102)

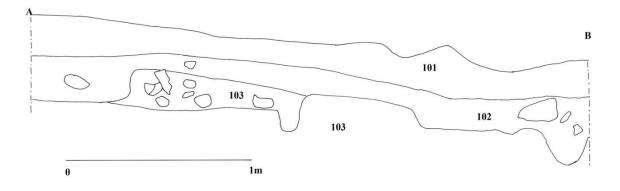


Figure 6 NE-facing profile of SW edge of Trench 1

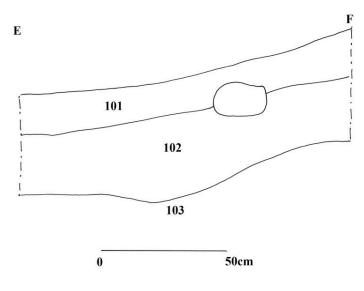




Figure 7 NW-facing profile of SE end of Trench 1

Plate 1 Trench 1, post excavation, facing NW

#### 6.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 3m NE-SW by 1m. The topsoil was between 35-50cm deep. Two features were recorded in Trench 2 (Figure 8).

- 6.2.1 Feature **2.01** was an unrecorded, modern test pit. The cut (C205) was identified where the moderately compact pale orange stony sand subsoil appeared slightly mixed with soil and became loosely compact in texture (fill of pit, C204). It had never been recorded and was identified by one of the members of the local community during the investigation.
- 6.2.2 Feature **2.02** was an alignment of medium-large stones packed with a pale brown sandy loam within the topsoil. It is interpreted as the degraded remains of a boundary dyke of uncertain date (Plate **2**).

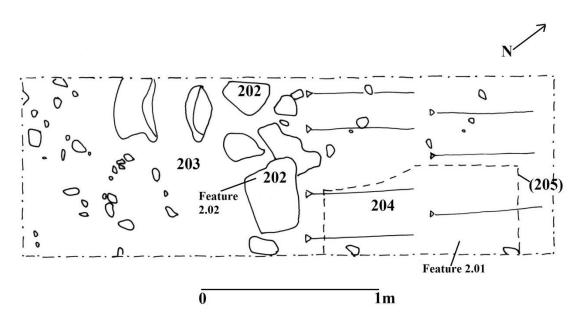


Figure 8 Trench 2, post-excavation, showing Features 2.01 and 2.02



Plate 2 Trench 2, facing SW, showing remains of wall, Feature 2.02



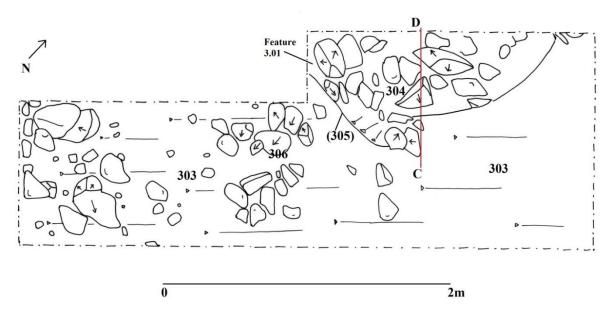
Plate 3 Trench 3, facing SW; Feature 3.01 in bottom right side of photo

#### 6.3 Trench 3

One feature of interest (3.01) was recorded in Trench 3 (Plate 3 and Figure 9), where topsoil was between 30-40cm deep.

A context change and a compact grouping of stones uncovered at the northeast edge of the trench led to the trench (originally 3m by 1m) being extended 2m to northeast and 0.5m to northwest in order to identify the feature.

- 6.3.1 Feature **3.01** comprised one edge of a cut filled with moderately compact cobbles and medium stones within a pale orange-pink silty sand (C304). It was half-sectioned to a depth of 40cm and found to be cut through the natural (Plate 4 and Figure 10). The cut and fill extended outside of the trench edge and its use and significance are unknown.
- 6.3.2 An alignment of possible stonework, **C306**, was identified to the south of the feature and was thought to be a structural footing. It was half-sectioned (see inset in Plate 4) and came straight down to the natural subsoil. Its significance remains undetermined.
- 6.3.3 No finds of significance were recovered from the trench.



#### Figure 9

Trench 3, post-excavation, showing the stone alignment (C306) in centre and Feature 3.01 (pit or ditch)



Plate 4 Trench 3 NE end, facing SW; Feature 3.01, after half-sectioning, showing the compact stony fill of the cut, which extends outside of the trench; inset: post-sectioning of Context 306

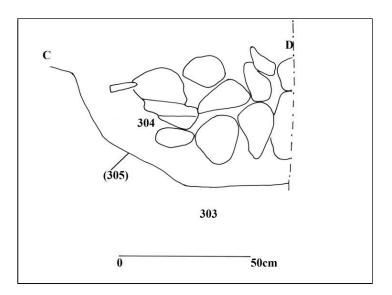


Figure 10 NE-facing section through Feature 3.01 ditch or pit of unknown use

#### 7 Discussion

The aim of the investigation was to provide training in archaeological trial trenching. The specific goal was to identify the presence of or lack of archaeological features on the ridge northwest of Applecross Broch in order to evaluate the interpretation of the 2005 geophysical survey of the ridge.

- 7.1 The results from the fieldwork, presented in Section 6, have indicated that the archaeological feature identified during the geophysical survey was probably an area of high resistance created by natural, geological remains.
- 7.2 In Trench 3, one feature of interest was identified. Although the trench was extended, the investigation design did not allow for a more extensive open area investigation to determine the full extent and significance of the feature.
- 7.3 In Trench 2, the location of Feature 2.01, a modern, unrecorded test pit, has now been recorded. The remains of the boundary wall, Feature 2.02, have also been identified and may correlate with a wall depicted on the historical OS mapping. Given the condition of the wall, it is possible that the structure predates the Post Medieval period and could be related to much earlier occupation of the ridge.

#### 8 Archiving and Finds Disposal

- 8.1 The paper digital files relating to the trial trenching investigation are currently being held by *Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services*. A copy of all digital files will be left with Applecross Heritage Centre. The paper archive will eventually be deposited with RCAHMS.
- 8.2 Finds reporting will be conducted in accordance with Scottish Treasure Trove procedures.

## 9 Reporting

- 9.1 Copyright of this report is held jointly by *Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services* and *Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme*.
- 9.2 The results of the fieldwork have been reported on *OASIS* and a report on the results will be made to the annual *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland (DES)*. A copy of this report will be submitted to the Highland Council Historic Environment Record.
- 9.3 A presentation of the results to the local community has been planned for October 2012.

#### **10** References

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Appendix 1	List of Contexts
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No.	Туре	Description	Fill of	Filled by	Under	Over	Feature No.	Finds	Plans- Sections	Interpretation
101	Deposit	Mid-brown, gritty/sandy soil with >1% small stones			Turf	102		1.01, 1.02, 1.03	S1	Turf and topsoil
102	Deposit	Pale orange/mid- brown silty-loamy sand with scattered small charcoal flecks			101	103		1.04	2, S1, S2	Mixed sand and soil, possible slopewash
103	Deposit	Pale orange sand w/ scattered stones, lightly compact at surface and increasingly compact below			102				2, S1, S2	Natural
201	Deposit	Turf and topsoil				202- 204		2.01		Turf and topsoil
202	Stone	Medium to large boulders within 2.01			201	203	2.02		1	Degraded remains of boundary wall footing
203	Deposit	Pale orange sand with scattered stones, lightly compact at surface and increasingly compact below; some charcoal flecks at surface (transition between upper contexts)			201, 202				1	Natural
204	Fill	Pale pink-orange sandy silt	205		201	205	2.01		1	Backfill of sondage
205	Cut	Rectangular cut 0.5 x 1.0m		204	204	203	2.01		1	Cut of unrecorded test pit
301	Deposit	Turf and topsoil				302 <i>,</i> 304				Turf and topsoil
302	Deposit	Pale orange/brown silty-loamy sand			301	303		3.01, 3.02		Mixed sand and soil, possible slopewash
303	Deposit	Pale orange sand with scattered stones, lightly compact at surface, increasingly compact below			302, 304- 306				3, S3	Natural
304	Deposit	Medium cobbles and stones within a pale orange-pink silty sand, moderately compact into cut	305		301	305	3.01	3.03	3, S3	Fill of pit/ditch(?)
305	Cut	One side of a cut through natural, contains stone fill		304	304	303	3.01		3, S3	Cut for ditch or pit?
306	Deposit	Small-medium stones sitting on natural, possible alignment			301	303	-		3	Alignment of stone-remains of structural footing?

Feature No.	Contexts	Finds	Plans	Description and Notes	Initials	Date
2.01	204, 205	-	1	Modern test pit, previously unrecorded	RGP	19/05/2012
2.02	202	-	1	Medium to large boulders with a pale orange-brown loamy sand, possible footing of a very degraded boundary wall with the topsoil	LF	19/05/2012
3.01	304, 305	3.03	3, S3	Moderately compact stone within a cutpossible ditch or pit of unknown use; very low alignment of stones, C306, may be associated; continues outside of the trench edges	AJG	20/05/2012

## Appendix 2 List of Features

# Appendix 3 List of Finds

Find No.	Context No.	Material	Feature No.	Description and Notes	Approx. Dating	Initials	Date
1.01	101	Fe	-	Corroded iron object	Unknown	EP	19/05/2012
1.02	101	Stone	-	Chert?	Unknown	MS	19/05/2012
1.03	101	Pottery	-	White glaze pottery	Post Medieval	MS	19/05/2012
1.04	102	Fe	-	Nail?	Unknown	MS	19/05/2012
2.01	201	Pottery	-	White glazed modern pottery sherds	Modern	AJM	19/05/2012
3.01	302	Agate?	-	Stone fragment, possible agate	-	AJG	19/05/2012
3.02	302	Glass	-	22mm, well-rounded on edges, greyish-blue tint		MS	20/05/2012
3.03	304	Possible lithic	3.01	Two small pieces of stone, thought to be possible worn debitage	Unknown	AJG	20/05/2012

# Appendix 4 List of Drawings

Plan No.	Section No.	Direction facing	Scale	Description	Contexts	Feature No.	Initials	Date
1	-	-	1:20	Mid-ex plan of Tr. 2	102, 103	-	RGP	19/05/2012
2	-	-	1:20	Post-ex plan of Tr. 1	202-205	2.01 <i>,</i> 2.02	MS	19/05/2012
-	1	NE	1:10	Tr. 1, NE-facing trench profile, A-B	101-103	-	МКР	20/05/2012
-	2	NW	1:10	Tr. 1, NW-facing section of SE end of trench edge, E-F	101-103	-	МКР	20/05/2012
3	-	-	1:20	Tr. 3 post-ex plan	303-306	3.01	LF, NG	20/05/2012
-	3	NE	1:10	Tr. 3 - Feature [3.01], NE-facing section C-D	303 <i>,</i> 304, 305	3.01	МКР	20/05/2012

Appendix 5	List of Samples
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Sample No.	Context No.	Feature No.	Volume - litres / grams	Sample Justification	Initials	Date
2.01	2.03		0.51	General sample - possible charcoal	AJM	19/05/2012

# Appendix 6 List of Photographs

No.	Direction Facing	Feature No.	Description	Taken By	Date
1	NNW		Trench 1 following topsoil stripping, working shot	MKP	19/05/2012
2	NNE		Trench 1 following topsoil stripping, working shot	MKP	19/05/2012
3	NW		Trench 1 following topsoil stripping, working shot	MKP	19/05/2012
4	NW		Trench 1, post-ex, showing stones sitting in the natural C103	MS	19/05/2012
5	SW		Trench 1, post-ex, showing stones sitting in the natural C103	MS	19/05/2012
6	SW		Trench 1, post-ex, showing stones sitting in the natural C103	MS	19/05/2012
7	NW		Trench 1, post-ex, showing stones sitting in the natural C103	MS	19/05/2012
8	NW		Trench 1 (C103), following removal of stones, post-ex	MS	19/05/2012
9	SE		Vertical profile of SE end of trench	MS	19/05/2012
10	S		Vertical profile of south corner of trench	MS	19/05/2012
11	NNE	2.02	Trench 2 following topsoil stripping, mid-ex	LF	19/05/2012
12	SW	2.02	Trench 2 following topsoil stripping, showing the large stones forming remains of boundary wall Feature 2.02	LF	19/05/2012
13	SE	2.02	Trench 2 following topsoil stripping, showing the large stones forming remains of boundary wall Feature 2.02	LF	19/05/2012
14	NE	2.02	Showing SW-facing section through the deposit underlying possible wall footing; showing stone natural below it	LF	19/05/2012
15	SE	2.02	Showing SW-facing section through the deposit underlying possible wall footing; showing stone natural below it	LF	19/05/2012
16	SE	2.02	Showing SW-facing section through the deposit underlying possible wall footing; showing stone natural below it	LF	19/05/2012
17	N		Working shot, Trench 3	МКР	20/05/2012
18	SSW	3.01	Trench 3, post-excavation, showing alignment of stones (C306 in centre) and Feature 3.01 cut/fill (C304-305, front right)	LF	20/05/2012
19	SSW	3.01	Trench 3, post-excavation, showing alignment of stones (C306 in centre) and Feature 3.01 cut/fill (C304-305, front right)	LF	20/05/2012
20	N	3.01	NE end of Trench 3, after half-sectioning pit/ditch Feature 3.01 showing another possible feature of stone continuing beyond trench edge; alignment of stones C306 in centre left of photo	МКР	20/05/2012

No.	Direction Facing	Feature No.	Description	Taken By	Date
21	NW	3.01	Pit/ditch Feature 3.01 after half-sectioning-shows compact stone fill continuing beyond trench edge; alignment of stones C306 in top left of photo	МКР	20/05/2012
22	SW	3.01	Pit/ditch Feature 3.01 after half-sectioning-shows compact stone fill continuing beyond trench edge	МКР	20/05/2012
23	W	3.01	Pit/ditch Feature 3.01 after half-sectioning-shows compact stone fill continuing beyond trench edge	МКР	20/05/2012
24	w	3.01	Pit/ditch Feature 3.01 after half-sectioning-shows compact stone fill continuing beyond trench edge	МКР	20/05/2012
25	N		NE end of Trench 3, showing possible feature of stone through the trench edge	МКР	20/05/2012
26	N		NE end of Trench 3, showing possible feature of stone through the trench edge	МКР	20/05/2012
27	N	3.01	Trench 3, section through C306 goes straight on to natural	МКР	20/05/2012
28	W	3.01	Trench 3, section through C306 goes straight on to natural; fill of pit/ditch Feature 3.01 in bottom right	MKP	20/05/2012
29	SW		Trench 2, working shot	SB	19/05/2012
30	SE		Trench 1, working shot	SB	19/05/2012