



ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

Duncansburgh MacIntosh Church of Scotland New Hall Extension, The Parade, Fort William: Archaeological Watching Brief



National Grid Reference
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Site Code
RoCAS Report
OASIS Number
Client
Author
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Duncansburgh MacIntosh Church
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Acknowledgements

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Summary

A watching brief was carried out on behalf of Duncansburgh MacIntosh Church on 19th February 2013 on the site of a proposed extension to the existing church hall. There were no archaeological features or finds identified.

1.0 Project Background

1.1 General

A controlled strip archaeological watching brief was conducted by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services (RoCAS) on 19th February 2013 in advance of development of an extension to the existing church hall at Duncansburgh MacIntosh Church, The Parade, Fort William (centred on NGR NN 10459 74053; Figure 1).

A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by RoCAS¹ based upon information supplied by the Highland Council Historic Environment Team² and Mike MacGruer of Bidwells.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The general aim of the archaeological watching brief is to identify and record any features or finds of archaeological importance during the initial site clearance that could be damaged or destroyed by this development, while minimising any delays or disruptions to the development project and to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered³. The end result of the archaeological watching brief is to make available the records of any archaeological remains found on a site.

The specific objectives are:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area
- To remove by hand any overburden in order to expose the archaeological deposits
- To record and excavate all features and recover any artefacts prior to their destruction
- To sample deposits for post-excavation work, including environmental analysis and dating
- To make recommendations for post-excavation work

2.0 Planning background

The controlled strip archaeological watching brief was conducted on 19th February 2013, as per Highland Council Planning Reference 10/04998/FUL.

The watching brief requirement has arisen due to the situation of the development within an area of high archaeological potential⁴. The application area is thought to overlie the former settlement of Maryburgh, as depicted on 18th century mapping, and excavation work under The Parade proved that remains of the former town survive beneath the present land surface.

¹ Fraser 2013

² HET 2011

³ Highland Council 2012

⁴ HET 2011



Figure 1: Site location and watching brief area

3.0 Site location

The development site is centred at approximately Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NN 10459 74053 in Fort William and lies between The Parade to the northwest and Fassiefern Road to the southeast (Figure 1). The site is located within the grounds of Duncansburgh Church to the rear of the Manse on ground that rises up to the southwest.

The underlying geology is Micaceous Psammite overlain by hummocky glacial deposits of diamicton, sand and gravel⁵.

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

Fort William is strategically situated at the head of the Great Glen where the River Lochy and River Ness flow into Loch Linnhe. The first reference to a settlement appears in 1597 and a turf and timber fort was constructed in 1654 by General George Monk. This fell into disuse and a new fort, named after William III, was begun in 1690. A sutlery or army followers' camp grew up around the fort, named Maryburgh after the queen, in the late 17th century. It was built of timber and turf so that it could easily be destroyed if rebellion broke out; it was destroyed on the governor's orders in advance of a Jacobite siege in early 1746^{6 7}.

Later known as Gordonsburgh, after the Duke of Gordon, the settlement was remodelled in the late 18th century to the southwest of its original location. It was renamed Duncansburgh in 1834 after the new feu superior, Sir Duncan Cameron of Fassiefern, and became established as the Burgh of Fort William in 1874⁸.

The coming of the railway to the West Highlands had a significant impact on Fort William. Part of the disused fort was obliterated and the heart of the town was cut off from the waterfront⁹.

The site is thought to overlie the former settlement of Maryburgh, as depicted on 18th century mapping¹⁰. Excavations carried out in 2007 by Dr Tony Pollard under The Parade proved that remains of the former town survive beneath the present land surface.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Desk-based assessment

A desk-based assessment was conducted prior to commencement of the evaluation in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area based on previously recorded sites and any historical documentation.

The drawings of the area, as supplied by the client, were checked in detail against the Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Map, the Highland Council's Historic Environment Record (HHER), the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), the Highland Council Archives and Historic Scotland's records of scheduled monuments and listed buildings. Online aerial photographs were checked and the map collections of the National Library of Scotland (NLS) were studied. Other literary sources were also consulted.

⁵ BGS 2013

⁶ Miers 2008, 12 -15

⁷ Pollard 2008

⁸ Miers 2008, 12 -15

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ HET 2011

5.2 Controlled strip

The purpose of the controlled strip archaeological watching brief was to identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest prior to development, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project or to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered.

The site topsoil clearance of the site was conducted under constant archaeological supervision and guidance using a mechanical excavator with a flat-edged bucket (Figures 2 and 3). Following machine excavation, the clearance area was cleaned back using a draw-hoe to allow for the identification of archaeological features. The site was plotted using a Trimble Geo-XR Rover capable of centimetre accuracy.

The development site was recorded using high resolution digital photography throughout the watching brief in order to record the evaluation.

All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with *Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct*¹¹ and *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*¹².

6.0 Results

6.1 Desk-based assessment

6.1.1 Historical mapping

The following historical maps were consulted online¹³:

Robert Johnson: Plan of Fort William with the country adjacent, surveyed and published circa 1710

This is a stylised map showing the fort and town of Maryburgh situated between the shore and hills beyond and streams to the southeast and southwest (Figure 2).

George Wade: District of Fort William, surveyed and published 1728

This is an early depiction of Fort William with the small town of Maryburgh constructed on low ground between the shoreline and heathland rising to the southwest beyond it.

George Wade: A Plan of Fort William in the Shire of Inverness, surveyed and published 1736

Fort William in 1736 consisted of a fort, after which the modern town is named, and the small town of Maryburgh to the south-west of the fort (Figure 3). The town roughly forms three sides of an open, rectangular piece of ground, which was the fort's parade ground. Lying to the south-east of Maryburgh, and running in an easterly direction along what appears to be the lower slopes of a steep hinterland, are gardens belonging to the garrison. Enclosures, presumably for agricultural purposes, are also depicted around the periphery of the fort and town.

¹¹ IfA 2008

¹² IfA 2010

¹³ NLS 2013

George Wade: Plan showing fortifications of Fort William and Town of Maryborough (circa 1736?)

This map shows the fortifications and township in greater detail.

Henry W. Parish: Sketch of the Ground in the Neighbourhood of Fort William (in the Shire of Inverness) and the Point of Corpach, surveyed and published 1782

This map again shows the fort and neighbouring town of *Mary Burgh*, which is also now known as *Gordon Burgh*. There are fewer houses depicted around the parade ground, with the bulk of the settlement stretching in a westerly direction along the shore (Figure 4).

Sir Howard Elphinstone: Fort William showing Episcopal Chapel, surveyed and published 1818

The town of Maryburgh is no longer shown flanking the parade ground, although there are a few buildings shown with garden/cultivation plots along its south-western edge (Figure 5).

OS 25 inch 1st Edition: Inverness Mainland, Sheet CL.7, surveyed 1871, published 1876

This map showing development around the old parade ground very much resembles the 1818 map noted above with a few buildings and garden grounds on its southeast and southwest sides.

OS 25 inch 2nd Edition: Inverness-shire – Mainland, 150.07, surveyed 1899, published 1901

By the time of the 2nd Edition map, some 28 years later, Fort William has developed considerably. The old parade ground has been retained as an open space and the Duncansburgh MacIntosh Church has been built, along with the Alexandra Hotel.



Figure 2: Excerpt from Robert Johnson's 1710 Plan of Fort William¹⁴

¹⁴ NLS 2013



Figure 3: Excerpt from Wade's 1736 plan of Fort William¹⁵

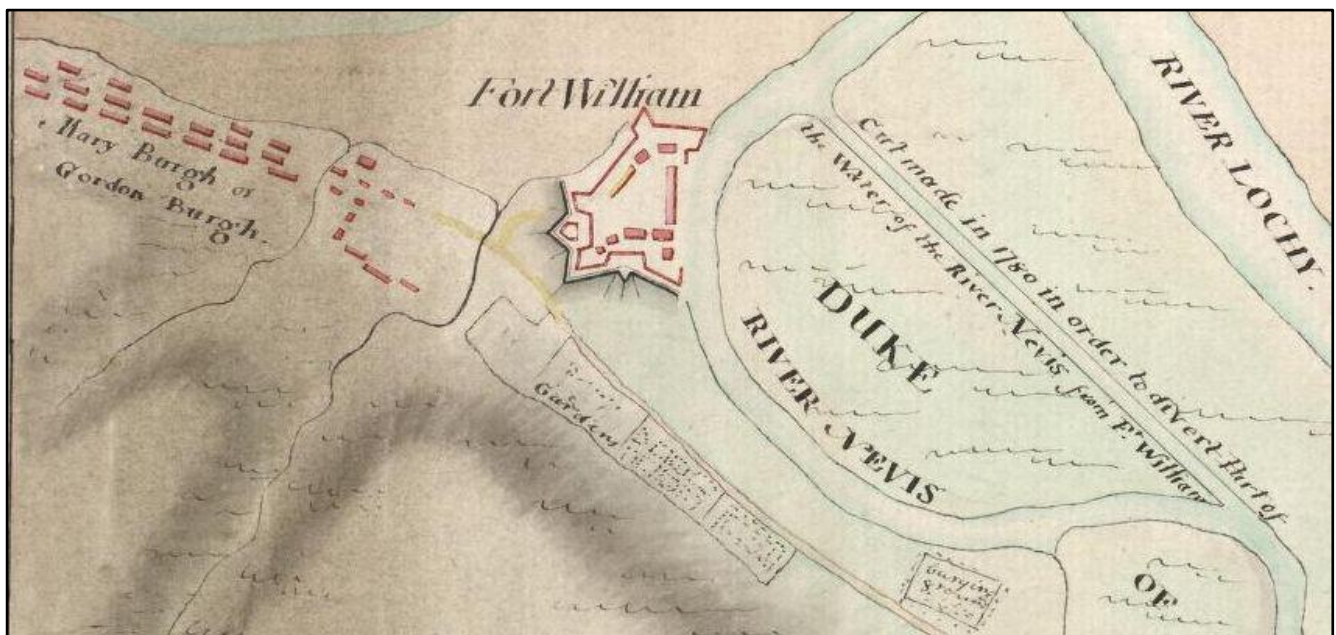


Figure 4: Excerpt from Parish's 1782 plan of Fort William showing the new location of the majority of Maryburgh¹⁶

¹⁵ NLS 2013

¹⁶ NLS 2013

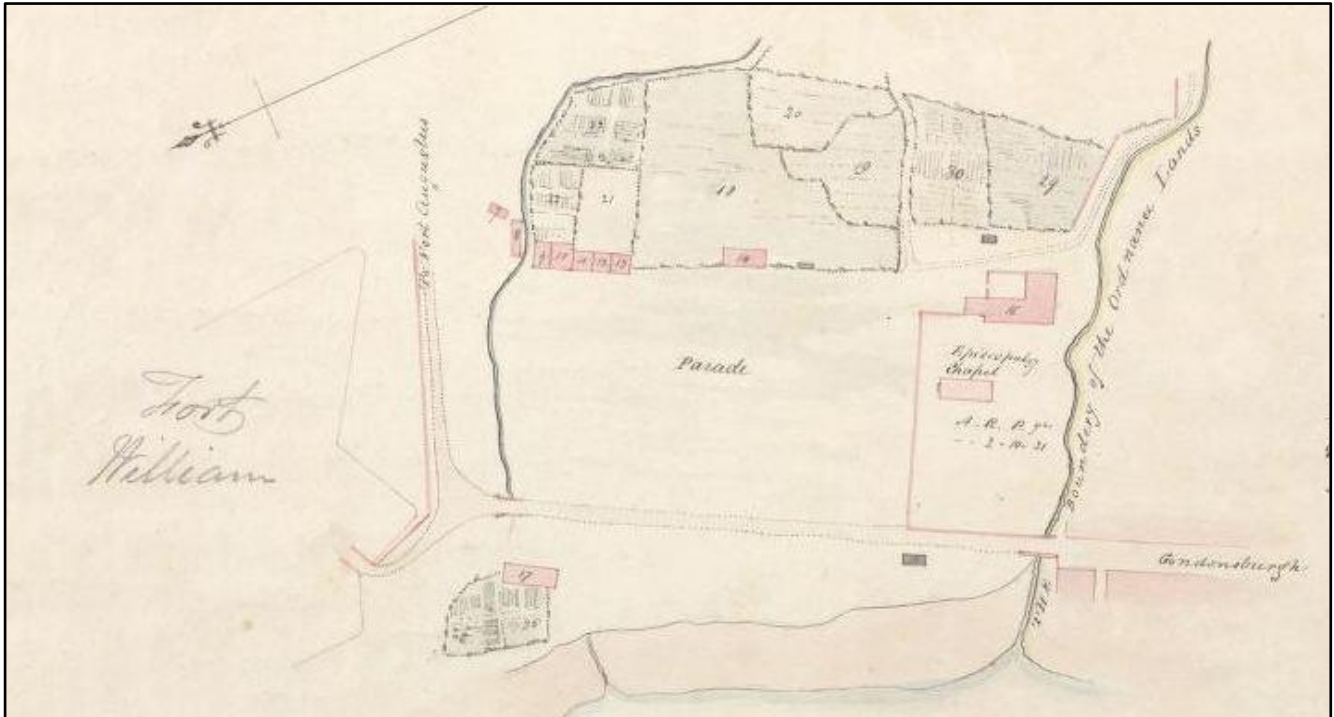


Figure 5: Excerpt from Elphinstone's 1818 plan of Fort William showing a lack of development around the old parade ground¹⁷



Figure 6: Excerpt from the OS 25 inch 2nd Edition map showing the railway and development in Fort William in the late 19th century¹⁸

¹⁷ NLS 2013

¹⁸ NLS 2013

6.1.2 Highland Historic Environment Record

The Highland Historic Environment Record¹⁹ was consulted online:

MHG21968 Duncansburgh Manse NN 10440 74030

Described by Miers²⁰ as a ‘[m]ullioned manse’.

MHG17167 Duncansburgh Parish Church of Scotland NN 10466 74048

This church is a Category B Listed Building dating to 1881. It is Gothic in style with a buttressed tower and wide gable with a large traceried window.

MHG17176 The Governor’s House NN 10416 74012

A Category B Listed Building, it is one of Fort William’s older buildings dating to the early-mid 18th century. Prior to its construction only wooden buildings were permitted outside the fort.

6.2 Watching brief

Weather conditions: cold, dry and sunny

The site was situated in the garden ground behind Duncansburgh Manse and sloped downhill from Fassiefern Road in a north-westerly direction. Prior to clearance, the site was grass covered (Plate 1). Below the turf there was one stratum: context 001, a dark brown loam, which overlay the subsoil, a light grey/yellow sandy gravel containing small to medium rounded cobbles. Towards the southeast end of the trench, there was a substantial area of iron pan, which was a dark brown/red colour (Plate 2). The trench depth varied from 0.34m – 0.5m, the deepest areas being at the upper end of the slope where a vegetable garden had been created in the past.

The topsoil contained a mix of fairly modern midden material (Plate 3), with the oldest artefact recovered probably part of a clay pipe stem (Plate 4).

No archaeological features were uncovered.

7.0 Discussion

The watching brief requirement arose due to the situation of the development within an area of high archaeological potential²¹. The application area was thought to overlie the former settlement of Maryburgh, as depicted on 18th century mapping, and excavation work under The Parade in 2007 proved that remains of the former town survive beneath the present land surface.

No archaeological features were uncovered during the watching brief and this may simply be due to the fact that historical mapping is not as accurate as modern mapping, often being a representation rather than an accurate record. This is particularly true of the earlier maps and it can be seen that the depiction of Maryburgh differs from map to map. Undoubtedly the town

¹⁹ HHER 2013

²⁰ 2008

²¹ HET 2012

size would have changed over time, but the mapping most likely shows a general illustration of Maryburgh rather than a depiction of individual buildings.

The historical maps do not show contours and it may well be that the site sits within the area shown as gardens for the garrison on Wade's 1736 map (Figure 3) and described as sloping, heathy ground on Wade's 1728 map. The site's location is shown as garden ground on Elphinstone's 1818 plan (Figure 5) and the OS 25 inch 1st Edition map and this could be a continuation of an earlier use as such.

8.0 Conclusions and recommendations

As no archaeological features were uncovered during the watching brief, it is recommended that no further work is necessary.

9.0 Reporting

This report will be disseminated to the contractor/developer, Highland Council Historic Environment Team and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

A digital report will be submitted with digital copies of the site photographs and georeferenced site plans in ESRI shapefile format. Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services will retain copyright of this report.

A summary of the watching brief will be submitted for publication in Archaeology Scotland's annual journal, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*. An OASIS entry has been completed.



Plate 1: The site prior to excavation, facing E. The building (top left) is the existing church hall.



Plate 2: The site post-stripping, facing WNW. It shows the ground sloping towards the Manse

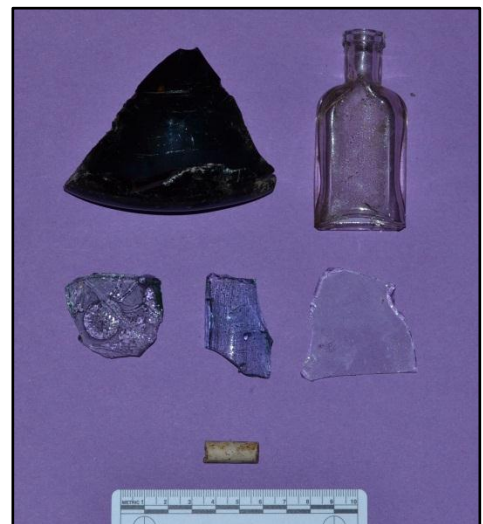


Plate3 (left): Ceramic finds and **Plate 4** (right): Glass finds and clay pipe stem recovered from the topsoil

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