



ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

Site Adjacent to Paddockhaugh and Dykeside Farm, Birnie, to the South West of Elgin: Watching Brief



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|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| National Grid Reference | NJ 20869 58740 |
| Planning Reference | 13/01505/APP |
| Site Code | BIR13 |
| RoCAS Report | 2013-37/BIR13 |
| OASIS Number | rosscrom1-165606 |
| Client | Mr W D Beaton |
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| Date | 28-11-2013 |

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Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was carried out by David Anderson and Lynn Fraser with voluntary assistance from John Barrett, Christine Clerk, Alistair MacPherson and Graham Robertson. We wish to thank Mr W D Beaton for commissioning the work. All mapping, unless otherwise stated, is reproduced by permission of Landmark Information Group under RoCAS licence LIG1044. Aerial imagery is reproduced under ESRI licensing and provided by the World Imagery layer. This is an unpublished report.

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of Mr W D Beaton on 13th and 20th November 2013 along the route of a new road to be created between an existing pot ale lagoon and Dykeside Farm, Birnie, Moray. The southern end of the proposed track crossed land that had been the subject of previous excavation by National Museums Scotland during fourteen years of fieldwork; unsurprisingly a small spread of features was revealed in this location. The features were not evaluated. The remainder of the watching brief area was devoid of archaeological features and finds.

1.0 Project Background

1.1 General

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services (RoCAS) on 13th and 20th November 2013 during topsoil removal prior to the construction of a road adjacent to Paddockhaugh and Dykeside Farm, Birnie, Moray (centred on NGR NJ 20869 58740; Figure 1).

A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by RoCAS¹ based upon information supplied by Moray Council's Archaeology Advisor² and Mr Beaton.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The general aim of an 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 archaeological watching brief was conducted on 13th and 20th November 2013, as per Moray Council Planning Reference 13/01505/APP, a retrospective planning application for a pot ale lagoon constructed in 2011 and a proposed new access road thereto .

The watching brief requirement arose due to the situation of the development site within an area of high archaeological sensitivity. The application area lies within a known extensive area of

¹ Fraser 2013

² Moray Council, undated

³ Highland Council 2012

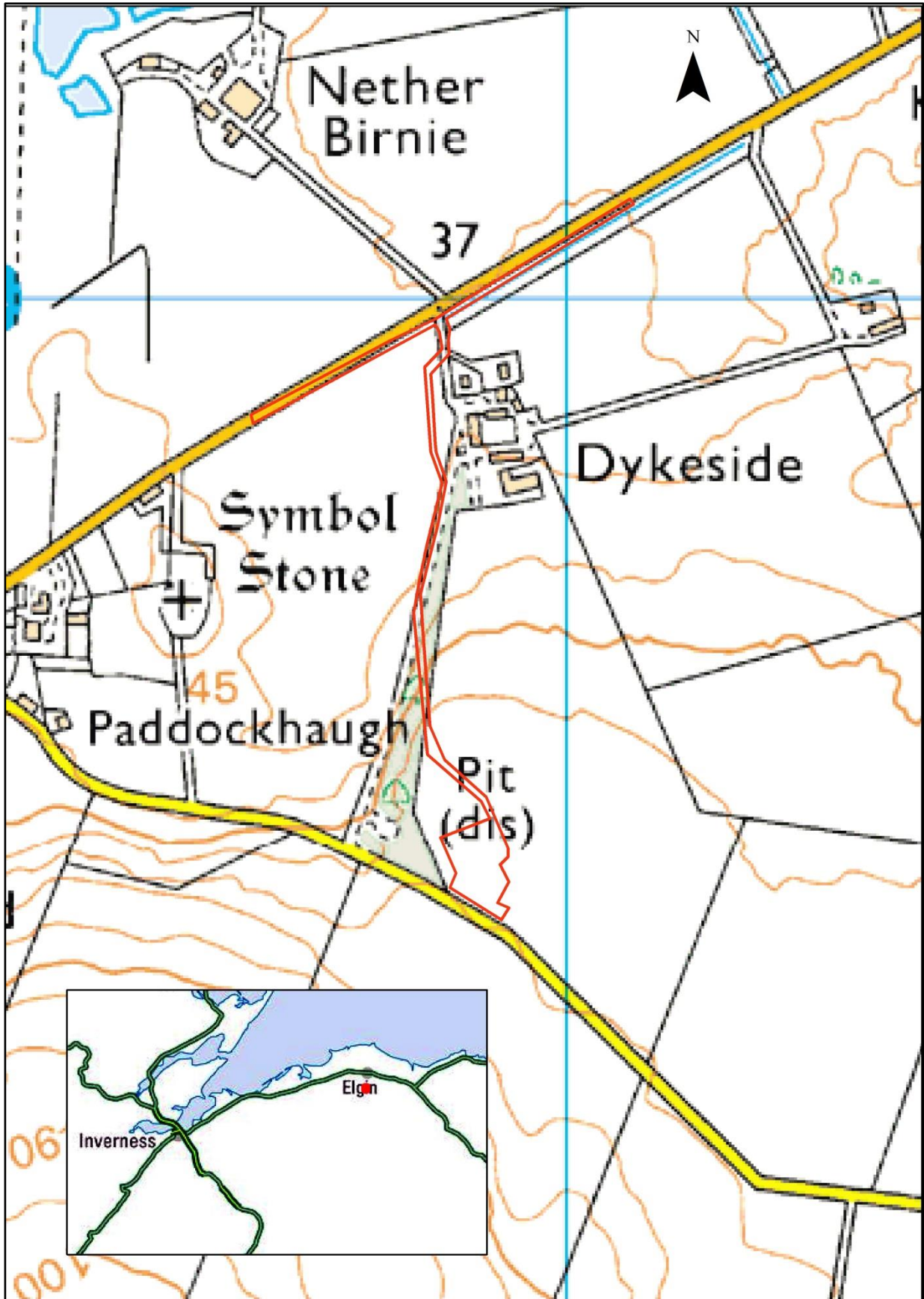


Figure 1: Site location based on plans provided by the client

multi-period settlement. In addition, crop marks signifying settlement, enclosures and other features lie to the west and north of the development area.

3.0 Site location

The development site is centred at approximately Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NJ 20869 58740 and lies on agricultural land between Paddockhaugh and Dykeside, Birnie, to the southwest of Elgin (Figure 1).

The underlying geology is Spey Conglomerate Formation overlain by glaciofluvial sheet deposits of gravel, sand and silt⁴.

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

The application area lies within a regionally significant archaeological site. Excavations from 1998-2010 revealed a long-lived later prehistoric site with a range of structures and artefacts attesting to a significant power centre during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age⁵ (Figure 2). To the west of the proposed access track, there is the site of a medieval corn-drying kiln, which has been excavated; Birnie Kirk, around the graveyard of which is an arc of an enclosure visible on aerial photographs as a crop mark and, in Paddockhaugh, there is the crop mark of a possible palisaded enclosure.

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, Moray Council's Sites and Monuments Record, the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) 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.

5.2 Archaeological watching brief

The purpose of the 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 were 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 (Figure 3). Following machine excavation, the clearance area was cleaned back using a draw-hoe to allow for the identification of archaeological features. As the ploughsoil at the south end of the site was to a

⁴ BGS 2013

⁵ Hunter 2010

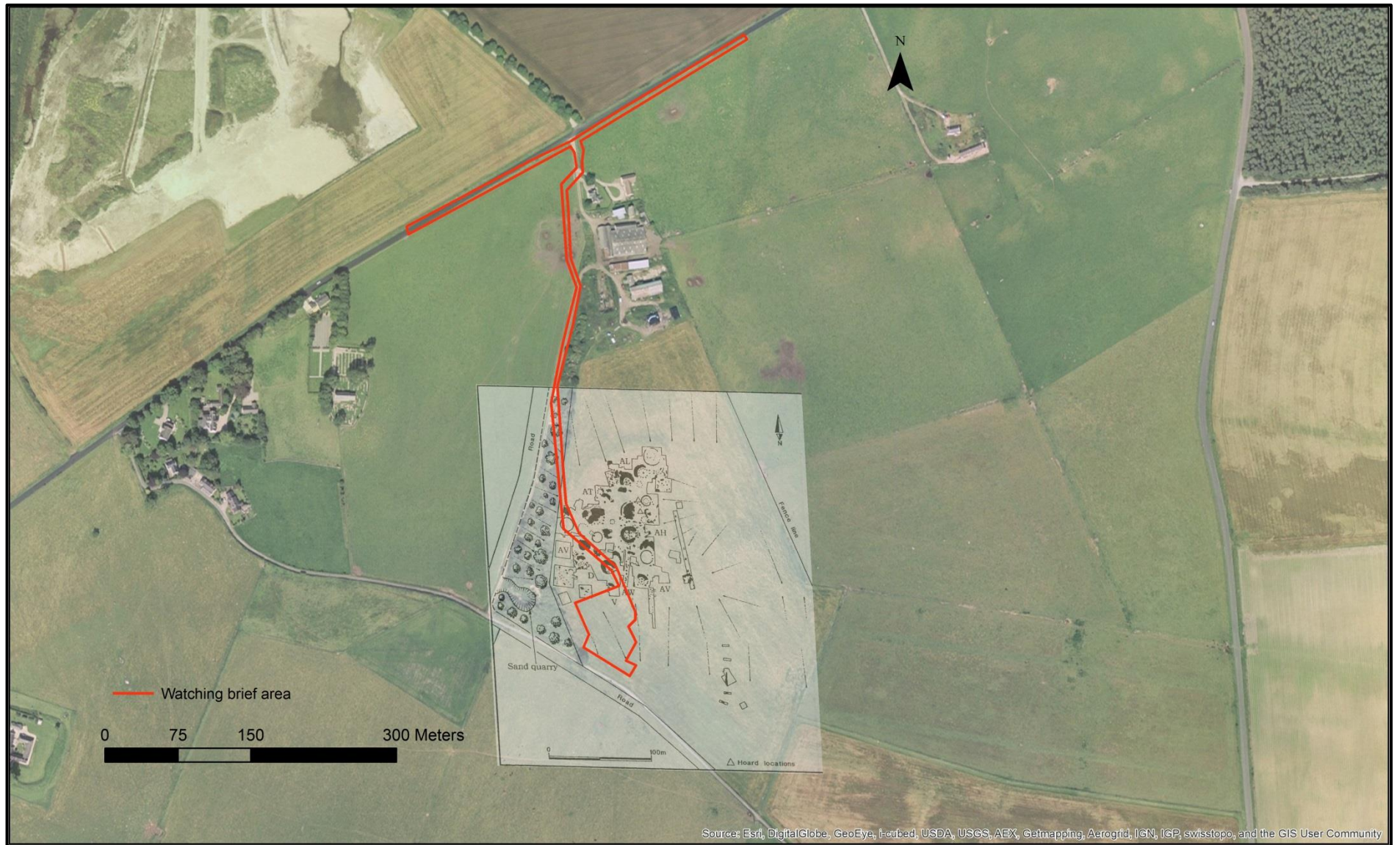


Figure 2: Aerial image⁶ of the watching brief area showing the extent of the 1998-2010 excavations by National Museums Scotland⁷

⁶ Reproduced under ESRI licensing and provided by the World Imagery layer

⁷ Trench plan taken from Hunter 2011

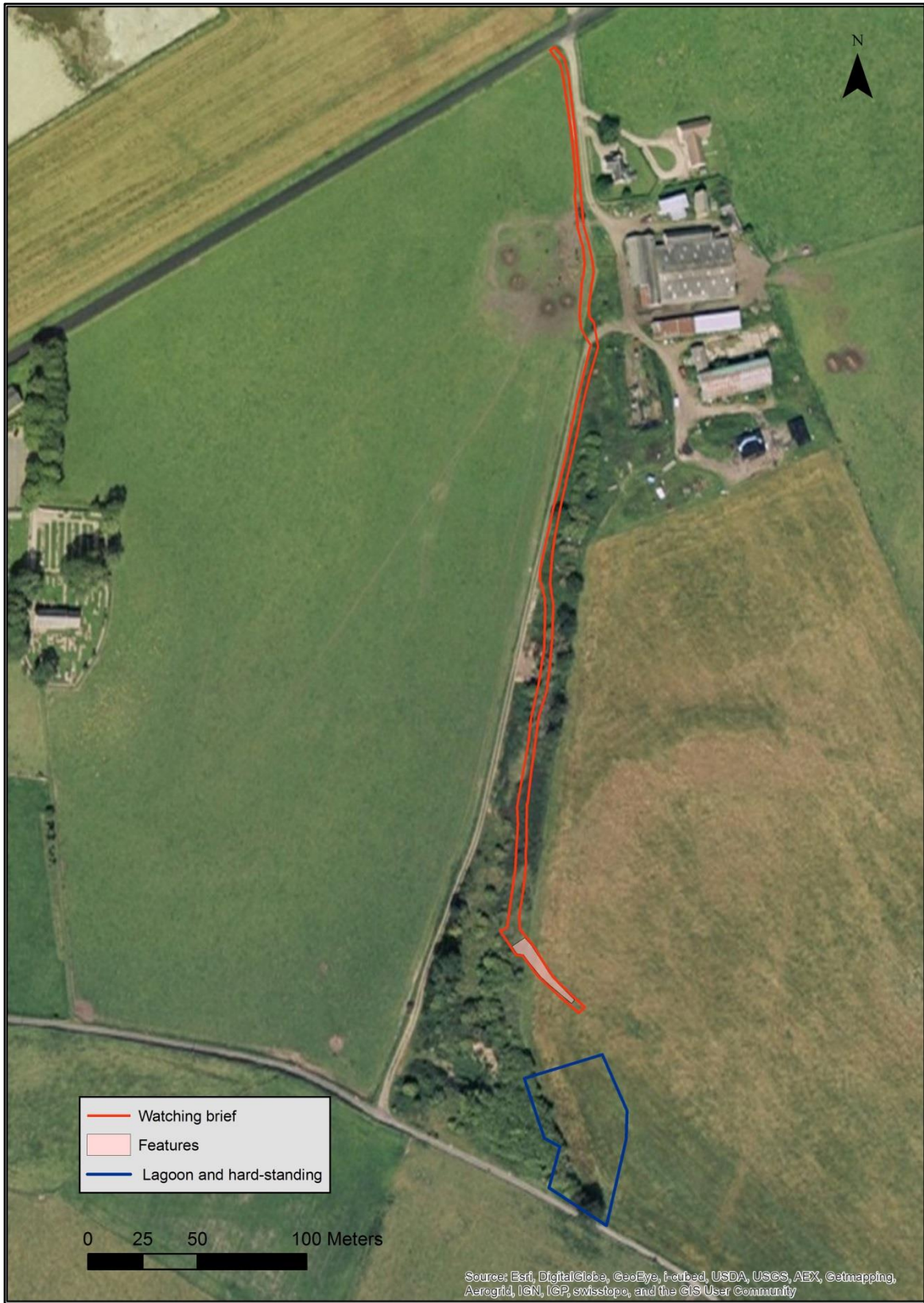


Figure 3: Aerial image⁸ of the area excavated under supervision and the location of the existing pot ale lagoon and hard-standing

⁸ Reproduced under ESRI licensing and provided by the World Imagery layer

significant extent backfilled spoil from the National Museums Scotland (NMS) excavations over the years, the spoil from this area of the current topsoil clearance was checked by an experienced metal detectorist. No finds resulted.

The site was plotted using Juniper's Archer handheld Windows Mobile-based computer capable of sub-metre 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*⁹ and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief¹⁰.

6.0 Results

6.1 Desk-based assessment

6.1.1 Historical mapping

The following historical maps were consulted online¹¹:

Timothy Pont 1560-1614: Map of Elgin and northeast Moray

The *K of Birnay* is marked on the map.

OS 25 inch 1st Edition: Elgin Sheet XII.7 (Combined), surveyed 1870, published 1874

This map shows a small area of rough ground to the west of the southern end of the watching brief area, together with the track that runs in a northerly direction to Dykeside Farm.

OS 25 inch 2nd Edition: Elginshire, Sheet 012.07, surveyed ca. 1904, published 1905

A gravel pit is now depicted in the area of rough ground.

6.1.2 Moray Sites and Monuments Record

The Moray Sites and Monuments Record¹² was consulted online. The following are located in the vicinity of the development site:

NJ25NW0024 Dykeside, multi-period settlement NJ 2099 5853

This is an area of extensive multi-period settlement extending from the Neolithic to Medieval periods. A vast array of artefacts has been recovered from the site including two Roman coin hoards.

⁹ IfA 2008

¹⁰ IfA 2012

¹¹ NLS 2013

¹² Moray SMR 2013

NJ25NW0068 Birnie, medieval corn-drying kiln NJ 2084 5851

A medieval corn-drying kiln was exposed in an old quarry edge. Excavations from 2008-2011 established that the kiln had been destroyed by fire.

NJ25NW0059 Birnie Hill, buildings NJ 2064 5850

A walk-over survey and subsequent excavation revealed the remains of buildings, which were dated through pottery finds to the medieval period.

NJ25NW0029 Paddockhaugh, crop mark NJ 2074 5859

A trapezoidal-shaped settlement with field system is visible as a crop mark. An evaluation carried out on the west side of this site was carried out in 2010, which showed that the ground level on the lower slopes of the Kirk hill had been deliberately built up, probably to avoid damp ground. Pits were cut into this and midden dumped in them. A possibly boundary ditch of the early church was also located.

NJ25NW0022 Birnie Kirk NJ 2065 5872

The arc of an enclosure was visible as a crop mark in 1981, around the graveyard at Birnie Kirk. This probably represents an earlier use of the kirk site in both the prehistoric and early medieval period.

NJ25NW0001 Birnie Parish Church NJ 2064 5871

Birnie Parish Church, erstwhile seat of the Bishopric of Moray (before 1224) and formerly dedicated to St. Brendan. Birnie is one of the oldest places of worship in Moray.

NJ25NW0002 Birnie Symbol Stone NJ 2063 5873

This is a Class I Symbol stone, which bears the eagle and z-rod as well as a rectangular device. It stands against the outside of the entrance to Birnie parish church (NJ25NW0001). It was visited in 1994 by RCAHMS, when it was noted that the symbols were quite weathered but still visible.

NJ25NW0025 Dykeside, crop mark NJ 2080 5879

This is the crop mark of a possible palisaded enclosure.

NJ25NW0021 Dykeside, crop mark NJ 2116 5880

The crop mark of a square enclosure is visible in an arable field. There are also several indeterminate features visible in the same field though whether they are related to the enclosure is unclear. These are also visible on 1976 aerial photographs and show the corner of an enclosure and an oval enclosure more clearly.

NJ25NW0044 Cloddach, pits NJ 2054 5896

A number of pits and post-holes were uncovered during extensions to Cloddach Quarry.

NJ25NW0055

Birnie, crop mark

NJ 2052 5884

A crop mark of an incomplete circle appears on aerial photographs from 1976. It is incomplete on its western side. It is possibly an enclosure.

6.2 Watching brief

Weather conditions: wet and windy

Pot Ale Lagoon and Hardstanding Area

The site for the pot ale lagoon and hard-standing area were included in the overall area for the watching brief evaluation (Figures 2 and 3; Plate 1). However, these areas were not subject to the current watching brief as they were developed in 2011. Although not subject to a watching brief condition as part of the planning process at that time, these areas were stripped of topsoil under close archaeological supervision due to the close proximity of the multi-period settlement site excavated by NMS over a period of fourteen years. A scatter of features was revealed including a small post-ring roundhouse, a blacksmith's pit and an unlined corn-drying kiln¹³.

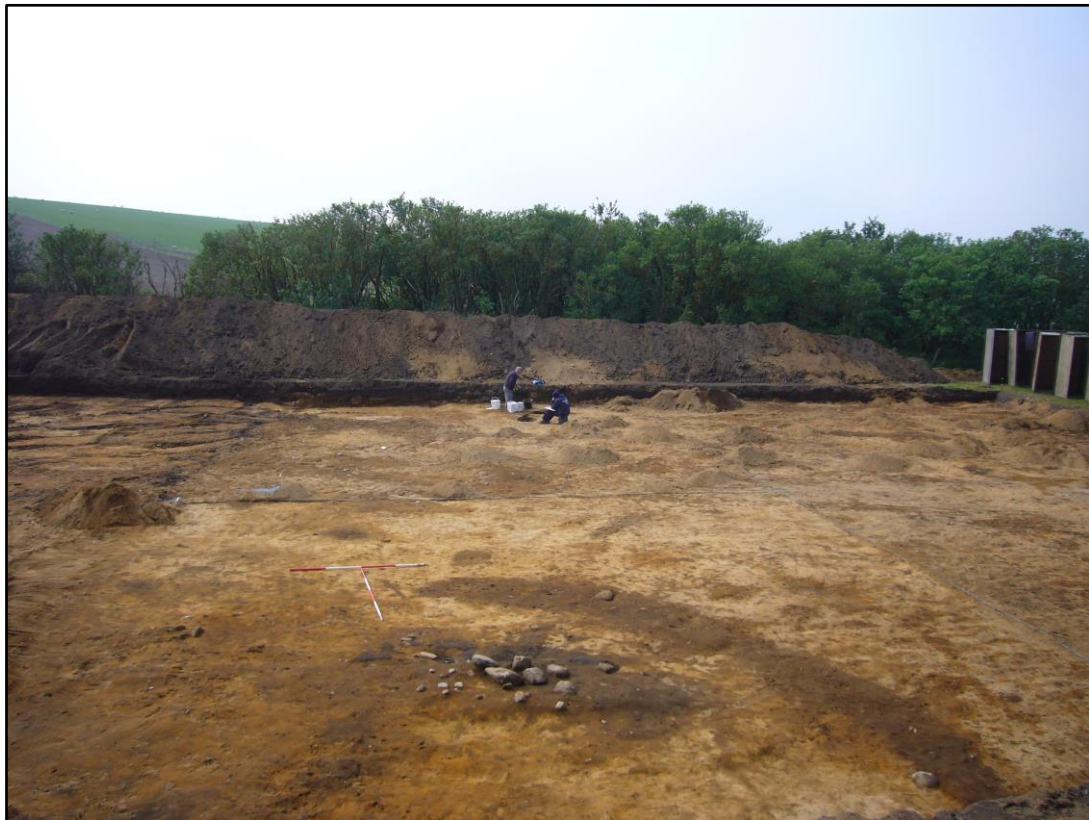


Plate 1: Excavation in progress in 2011 on the site of the pot ale lagoon

¹³ Hunter 2012

Access Road

Clearance of the topsoil for the new access track was conducted over two days. The topsoil depth varied from 0.30m to 0.75m along the length of the watching brief area.

A length of the southern end of the track, located to the north of the lagoon, was first stripped of topsoil (amounting to 0.3m) to ascertain the extent and nature of any archaeological features so that the developer could make an informed decision as to whether to continue with the development. It was anticipated, based on the location of the previous excavations' trenches (Figure 2), that the access track would run through an old NMS trench with the possibility of some previously unexcavated features. This proved to be the case with a thin scatter of small features exposed along the track to the break of slope (Plate 2); some of which had previously been excavated. Following consultation with Dr Hunter, NMS these features were not excavated; they were, however, planned at a scale of 1:20. They will be covered with a membrane prior to construction of the road. Based upon this trial clearance the developer was satisfied that the length of proposed track running from the southern end of the exposed ploughsoil to the northern end of the existing hardstanding could be dealt with by removing only 0.15m of the topsoil and laying membrane over the remainder prior to depositing aggregate, so as to protect the underlying archaeology. The remainder of the watching brief did not reveal any archaeological features or finds.

The stretches of road widening to the north of Dykeside Farm were not monitored as the ground had previously been disturbed through ditching and cable laying activities.



Plate 2: A scatter of features on the terrace to the north of the pot ale lagoon

7.0 Discussion

The watching brief requirement arose due to the situation of the development within an area of high archaeological sensitivity¹⁴.

As anticipated, a scatter of features was revealed on the terrace in the vicinity of previous excavations by NMS. Some of these features had been excavated as part of those excavations. The remainder of the features revealed were not excavated as the results would not add greatly to the corpus of information from the site.

8.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The archaeological features uncovered at the southern end of the access road should be covered with a protective membrane prior to construction of the road.

No further archaeological work is recommended.

9.0 Reporting and archiving

This report will be disseminated to the contractor/developer, Moray Council's Archaeology Advisor, National Museums Scotland 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.

All plans will be deposited with National Museums Scotland.

¹⁴ Moray Council undated

10.0 References

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Appendix: Index of Photographs

| No. | Direction facing | Feature No. | Notes | Taken by | Date |
|-----|------------------|-------------|--|----------|------------|
| 1 | SSE | - | The south end of the track with the lagoon in the background | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 2 | NNW | | The south end of the track showing some of the features uncovered | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 3 | W | | The south end of the track showing some of the features uncovered | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 4 | W | | The south end of the track showing some of the features uncovered | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 5 | N | | Taken from the top of the scarp looking towards Dykeside | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 6 | SSW | | Band of clay at the top of the scarp | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 7 | N | | The excavated track down the scarp towards Dykeside | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 8 | N | | Section of new access track at the base of the scarp to where it ran alongside the existing track. Modern rubbish visible. | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 9 | NNE | | The new access track running alongside the existing track | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 10 | NNE | | Pot ale lagoon | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 11 | N | | New access track to Dykeside | LF | 20/11/2013 |
| 12 | N | | Northern end of the new access track | LF | 20/11/2013 |