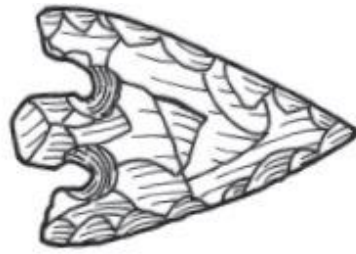


RoCAS



ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

Noss Head, Wick Ground Investigations

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Noss Head, Wick

Ground Investigations Archaeological Watching Brief

Client	Raeburn Drilling
Planning Reference	Unknown
National Grid Reference	ND 3330 55024 (centred)
Site Code	NHW14
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Fieldwork was conducted by Lynn Fraser. We would like to thank Craig Ritchie of Raeburn Drilling for commissioning the work and for his help on-site. Ordnance Survey mapping is reproduced by permission of Landmark Information Group under RoCAS licence LIG1044. Mapping containing Ordnance Survey data is subject to Crown Copyright 2014. All rights reserved. Licence number 100022432. This is an unpublished report.

Summary

An archaeological watching brief of five test pits and five boreholes was conducted on behalf of Raeburn Drilling on 25th September 2014 during ground investigations in advance of proposed works to be carried out by Scottish and Southern Electricity at Noss Head, Wick. There were no features of archaeological interest uncovered in the test pits or boreholes.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during ground investigations in advance of proposed works to be carried out by Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE) at Noss Head, Wick. The work was requested by Raeburn Drilling as an SSE requirement due to the location of the development in the middle of a landscape with prehistoric, post-medieval settlement and WWII remains, which has substantial potential for buried archaeological remains to be identified.

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to efficiently record the character, extent, condition and date of any archaeologically significant remains before destruction and to evaluate the site for archaeological potential.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the watching brief was to allow any archaeological features or objects to be identified and recorded before destruction and to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest were uncovered¹. The *Scottish Planning Policy 2014* and PAN 2/2011 describe how archaeology should be managed when considering planning decisions and determining conditions for developments that have an impact on the historic environment². The end result of the fieldwork is to make available the records of any archaeological remains found on a site.

The specific objectives were:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the area evaluated during the ground investigations
- 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 further measures necessary to mitigate the impact of the development
- To make recommendations for further monitoring or post-excavation work, if required

¹ Highland Council 2012

² The Scottish Government 2011; 2014

2.0 Site Location

The development area (Figure 1) is centred on NGR ND 38330 55024 in the former parish of Wick in Caithness. It lies to the south-southwest of Noss Head, approximately 4km to the north of Wick, and to the east of Wick airfield.

The underlying geology of the site is Spital Flagstone overlain by Devensian till³. The development site is on a flat cliff-top at 30m OD.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The name Noss Head comes from the Old Norse word, *Snos*, meaning a nose, which has been applied to the nose-shaped headland⁴. Situated at the tip of the headland is a lighthouse built in 1849. Surrounding the lighthouse is a patchwork of fields containing a variety of archaeological structures spanning from prehistory to WWII. In addition, fieldwalking in 2003 produced a collection of prehistoric lithics and some probable Norse pottery.

On the northern side of the headland are the remains of Castle Sinclair Girnigoe, occupied by the Sinclair family Earls of Caithness. It is separated from the mainland primarily by an arm of the sea known as a goe. There are two distinct groups of buildings forming the Castle as it is divided into an inner and outer bailey by a dry moat. Access to the outer bailey is through a vaulted late 14th Century passageway which leads into a courtyard, surrounded by buildings. There was a drawbridge over the internal dry moat to the surviving Tower House which rises to three storeys, with one wing built to the east on the sea side. One of the two rooms forming the basement of the Tower House probably contained a well - now in-filled. The inner bailey has a range of out buildings running to the end of the peninsula where a stone staircase cut through the middle of it descends to a sally point. It was built as one Castle in the late 14th century and adapted regularly over time until abandoned and partially demolished in the mid-17th Century⁵.

To the west of the development site lies Wick Airport, originally a grass airfield used by Highland Airways Ltd from 1933-1939 when it was taken over by the Air Ministry. Reconstructed with hard runways, hangars and other buildings it was then administered by No. 18 Group, R.A.F Coastal Command. On 26 October 1940, the Luftwaffe carried out a surprise raid on Wick and the airfield where high explosive bombs were dropped⁶.

³ BGS 2010

⁴ Northern Lighthouse Board 2009

⁵ Castle Sinclair Girnigoe Caithness undated

⁶ HIAL undated

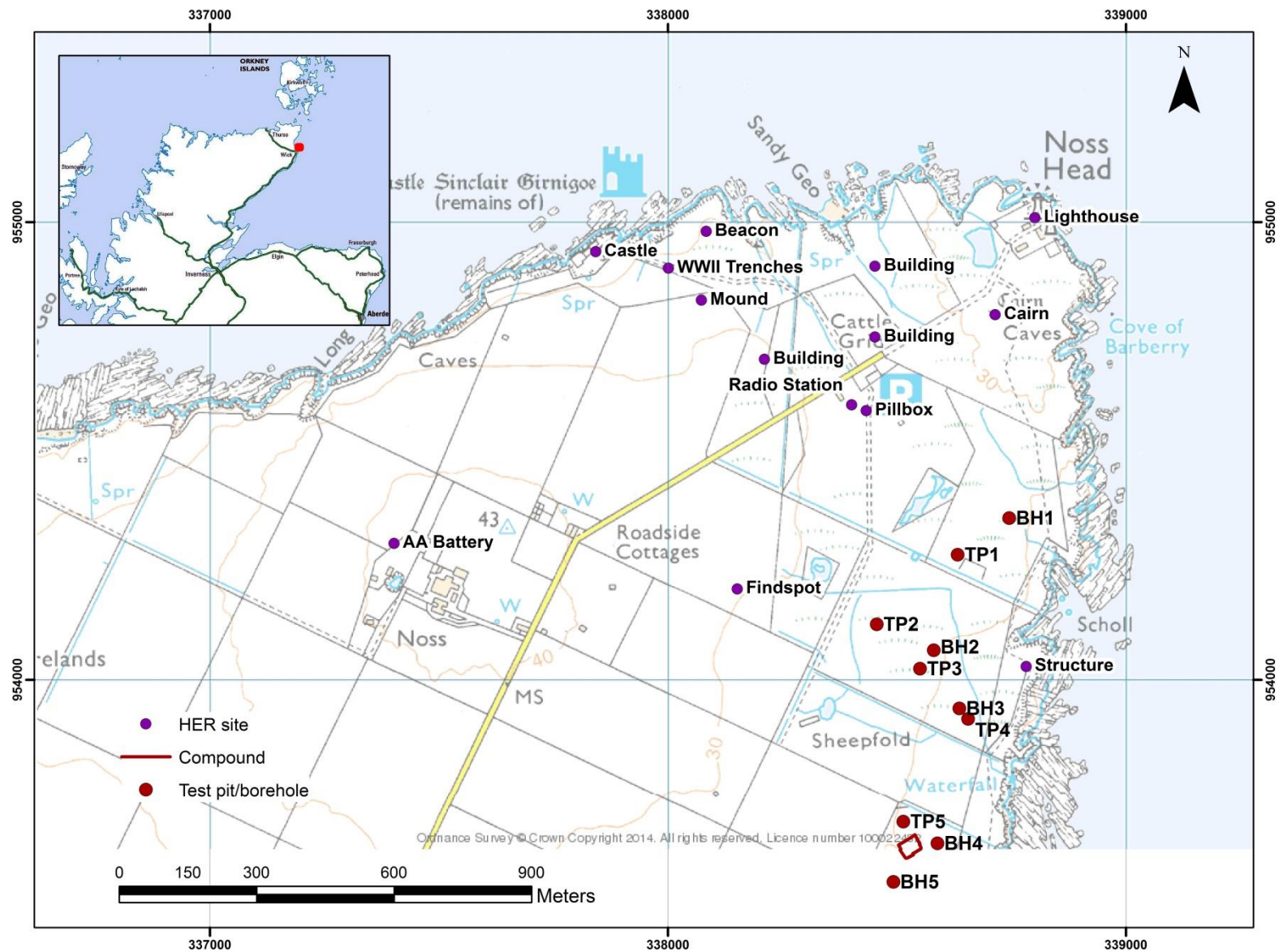


Figure 1: Location of the compound, test pits, boreholes and Historic Environment Record (HER) sites

4.0 Methodology

All work was conducted in accordance with Highland Council's *Standards for Archaeological Work*⁷ and the Institute for Archaeologists' (IfA) *Code of Conduct*⁸.

4.1 Desk-based Assessment

The purpose of the desk-based assessment (DBA) was to gain information about the known archaeology or potential for archaeology within a given area or site (including the presence or absence, character and extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and relative quality of the potential archaeological resource), in order to make an assessment of its merit in context and assist in the formulation of a strategy for further work. This information will also inform the field archaeologist of the potential nature of archaeological features to be uncovered during fieldwork.

A DBA was conducted in advance of fieldwork. A full check of all available historical and archaeological records, aerial photographs and historical maps was conducted using the Highland Historic Environment Record (HHER), the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), Ordnance Survey Name Books, Historic Scotland's databases, the National Library of Scotland, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland databases, statistical accounts and other available records, literary sources or online resources about the site.

4.2 Watching Brief

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to efficiently identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest uncovered during the development work, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project⁹.

Topsoil clearance of five test pits and five boreholes was conducted under the guidance of an archaeologist. This was conducted using a smooth-bladed bucket on a mechanical excavator down to the first archaeological horizon or subsoil¹⁰.

5.0 Results

5.1 Desk-based assessment

The desk-based assessment provides information about previous historical and archaeological records in and around the proposed development area.

⁷Highland Council 2012

⁸Institute for Archaeologists, 2012

⁹Highland Council, 2012

¹⁰Highland Council 2012

5.1.1 Cartographic Sources

The site location and surrounding landscape were examined using mapping held on-line by the National Library of Scotland¹¹.

First Edition 6-inch-to-the-mile Ordnance Survey map

Caithness, Sheet XX

Survey date: 1872 Publication date: 1877

The map shows the area within which the compound, test pits and boreholes are situated as unimproved farmland. There are no structures shown other than field boundaries. A tumulus is marked in the location of the burial cairn (MHG2161).

Second Edition 6-inch-to-the-mile Ordnance Survey map

Caithness-shire Sheet XX

Publication date: 1907 Date revised: 1905

There is no change from the 1st Edition map.

5.1.2 Aerial Photographs

Modern aerial images supplied by Bing Maps¹² were checked. There were no potential archaeological sites observed other than a sheepfold shown on modern OS mapping.

5.1.3 Highland Historic Environment Record (HHER) Sites

The following sites are recorded surrounding the development area:

MHG2050 Structure, Swallow Geo ND 3878 5403

This was recorded as a turf-covered, roughly circular structure measuring 12m x 8m and standing up to 0.3m high.

MHG47869 Fieldwalking finds ND 381 542

In 2003, at ND 375 542 (area), eight fields were walked on Noss Head, including one adjacent to Girnigoe and Sinclair Castles, where a single piece of probable Norse pottery was recovered. Only one discrete cluster of material was found in the area (centre ND 3815 5420), which contained two leaf-shaped arrowheads and blade and flake debitage. Isolated finds, including a leaf-shaped arrowhead, scrapers and two microliths, were also recovered, although the quantity of 'background noise' was low. The farmer, Mr A Morgan, has subsequently recovered a single leaf-shaped arrowhead and a bifacial knife from one of the fields surveyed.

MHG27901 AA Battery, Noss Farm ND 3740 5430

This is an anti-aircraft battery, which was initially armed with two 3-inch guns and later four 3.7-inch guns.

¹¹ National Library of Scotland, 2014

¹² Supplied under ESRI licensing and Microsoft Bing Mapping

- MHG37683** **Pillbox, Noss Head** **ND 3843 5459**
RCAHMS recorded in 2001 that a pillbox is visible on post-war vertical air photographs at the east end of the fenced enclosure of the radio station.
- MHG21906** **Radio Station, Noss Head** **ND 3840 5460**
RCAHMS recorded in 1996 that a radio station is visible at this location on a Luftwaffe aerial photograph taken in 1940.
- MHG2161** **Burial Cairn, Noss Head** **ND 3871 5479**
This is a reduced cairn about 4m diameter with two slabs showing at the cairn and several beside it. It stands to about 0.6m high.
- MHG2059** **Buildings, Noss Head** **ND 3845 5475**
These are described as a group of structures that are generally rectangular, lacking in stone and standing about 0.2m high.
- MHG2062** **Building, Noss Head** **ND 3821 5470**
This comprises the grass-covered foundations of a building 18.5 by 17m, with a partition and traces of two outbuildings and a garden.
- MHG2060** **Building, Noss Head** **ND 3845 5490**
This is a possible structure, comprising a grass-covered mound 0.6m high and measuring 12 by 11m, of indistinct form, lying in heathland on the side of a geo.
- MHG691** **Beacon, Noss Head** **ND 3808 5498**
These are grass-covered mounds, between 4 and 5m across, surrounded by flat ditches and lying 6 to 12m apart. They appear to be modern, 19th / 20th century and constructed for uncertain military purposes. The drainage ditch is later than the mounds.
- MHG2049** **Mound, Noss Head** **ND 3807 5483**
A stony mound 4.5 by 7.25m lying on the cliff-top adjacent to a modern field boundary was recorded by C E Batey in 1981. When visited by the OS in 1982 they noted that the only mound noted in the vicinity was an earthen example at ND 3807 5483. It measures 11.0 by 7.0m and is probably spoil from some agricultural activity.
- MHG2130** **WWII Defences, Castle Sinclair** **ND 3800 5490**
RCAHMS recorded in 1988 that zig-zag features visible on air photographs appear typical of 2nd world war infantry trenching, probably dug during training.
- MHG417** **Castle Girnigoe** **ND 3784 5493**
Castle Girnigoe, the earlier and better preserved of two castles occupies a narrow, rocky peninsula, 400ft long and 40ft to 60ft high, which has been crossed at its neck by a partly rock-cut trench about 10ft wide and 14ft deep. About a third of way along peninsula is another rock-cut trench, 14ft in width and depth. Castle Girnigoe stands on the inner side, its outer ward comprising the area between the two trenches. This was defended by a gatehouse with a draw-bridge across an outer trench and a curtain wall to S. The northern side was naturally defended by cliffs. The castle, late C15th in date, belonged to Sinclair Earls of Caithness and

was originally L-plan, the main block running N-S and rising to a height of five storeys, with stair tower forming the second element. To this an E-W wing was added on the N, forming an E-plan. Lesser buildings occupied area E of the main structure. The castle was defended against assault from the sea by a strong wall built across the geo to the S. In 1963, the keep of Castle Girnigoe still stood 14-17m high, the walls being 1.2-1.7m thick. The range of buildings to NE was a turfed-over foundation, 1.5m max height. The outer ditch appeared to have been a natural gully utilised as a defence

MHG2063 Castle Sinclair Girnigoe ND 3784 5493

Castle Sinclair, successor to Castle Girnigoe and erected in its outer ward in 1606. Reflecting changing taste of its period, a building of some architectural pretension, 3 storeys high in part, with apartments forming N range and offices along S curtain. The castle belonged to Sinclair Earls of Caithness, and it was dispute about succession which led to attack 1679 which so damaged castle that it was abandoned. In 1963, one fragment stood to roof height but the other walls had a max height of 5m and some were turfed-over foundations, 0.4m high. The outer walls were generally 1.5m thick, but some to SW reached 3m in thickness.

MHG2171 Dyke, Castle Haven ND 3789 5493

A grass-covered wall, 8m long, with an entrance 2.4m wide, crosses the promontory at Castle Haven, 45m from its end. It would appear to be an old barrier, probably to keep stock from the promontory and may be associated with Castles Sinclair and Girnigoe.

5.2 Archaeological Watching brief

The archaeological watching brief was conducted on 25 September 2014 during a period of dry, partly cloudy weather.

A compound area had already been stripped of topsoil using a flat-edged bucket. This was inspected for evidence of archaeological features. The subsoil was grey/yellow clay, which was smeared in places. Despite this there were no archaeological features or finds identified within the compound area.

Five test pits and five boreholes were excavated across a wide area (Figure 1) by a mechanical excavator equipped with a flat edged bucket to the topsoil/subsoil interface. Details of the test pits and boreholes, which measured between 2m to 2.5m long, are shown in Table 1 below. Test pit 5 (Plate 1) and borehole 3 (Plate 2) both had what appeared to be a modern ploughmark running across the subsoil. Both were investigated and found to be approximately 0.03m deep. No features or finds were uncovered in any of the other trenches.

6.0 Discussion

There were no individual archaeological horizons identified between the topsoil and the plough soil in the test pits and boreholes. While no features or finds were uncovered during the watching brief, it should be borne in mind that a variety of finds were recovered through fieldwalking in 2003 in fields to the west of the track currently being used to access the proposed development site.

Table 1: Test pits and boreholes

Test Pit No.	Dimensions (m)	Topsoil	Subsoil
TP 1	2.5 x 1.5	Dark brown/black peaty loam, 0.25m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
TP 2	2 x 1.5	Dark brown, wet, clayey loam, 0.3m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
TP 3	2.5 x 1.5	Dark brown clayey loam, 0.3m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
TP 4	2 x 1.5	Mid-brown loamy clay, 0.3m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
TP 5	2 x 1.5	Mid-brown loamy clay, 0.3m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
BH 1	2 x 1.5	Dark brown peaty loam, 0.3m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
BH 2	2.5 x 1.5	Dark brown clayey loam, 0.25m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
BH 3	2.5 x 1.5	Dark brown loamy clay, 0.25m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
BH 4	2 x 1.5	Dark brown clayey loam, 0.25m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone
BH 5	2 x 1.5	Dark brown, grading down to mid-brown silty loam, 0.3m deep	Yellow/orange/grey clay overlying degraded flagstone

**Plate 1:** Test pit 5 showing plough mark**Plate 2:** Borehole 3 showing plough mark

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the results of the watching brief, there is no recommendation for further archaeological intervention at the site. There is always, however, a possibility that buried archaeology may be present and recourse should be made to the Highland Council Historic Environment Team in the event of remains or finds being uncovered.

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Appendix 1 Index of Photographs

No.	Direction Facing	Feature No.	Notes	Taken By	Date
1	NNW - NE	-	A view of the compound area	LF	25/09/2014
2	-	-	Working shot of bomb disposal expert checking for unexploded ordnance	LF	25/09/2014
3	-	-	Working shot	LF	25/09/2014
4	NW	BH5	Borehole 5 post-stripping to the subsoil	LF	25/09/2014
5	W	BH4	Borehole 4 post-stripping to the subsoil.		
6	W	TP5	Test pit 5 post-stripping to the subsoil. A possible plough mark can be seen running across the trench.	LF	25/09/2014
7	NNW	TP4	Test pit 4 post-stripping to the subsoil.	LF	25/09/2014
8	NW	BH3	Borehole 4 post-stripping to the subsoil. A possible plough mark is visible.	LF	25/09/2014
9	NW	BH2	Borehole 2 post-stripping to the subsoil.	LF	25/09/2014
10	NW	TP3	Test pit 3 post-stripping to the subsoil.	LF	25/09/2014
11	WNW	TP2	Test pit 2 post-stripping to the subsoil.	LF	25/09/2014
12	NW	BH1	Borehole 1 post-stripping o the subsoil.	LF	25/09/2014
13	-	-	Working shot of stripping beginning at TP1.	LF	25/09/2014