

SOAKAWAY REPLACEMENT PIT CRATHES CASTLE STABLES ABERDEENSHIRE



- Archaeological Watching Brief -
Carried out 20th February 2012
by
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2012-7
by
H K Murray

H K Murray BA, PhD, MIFA, FSA Scot
J C Murray BA, MIFA, FSA Scot, FMA
Hill of Belnagoak, Methlick, Ellon, Aberdeenshire AB41 7JN
Telephone: (01651) 806394 e-mail: cmurray@btinternet.com

CRATHES CASTLE STABLES ABERDEENSHIRE SOAKAWAY REPLACEMENT PIT

-Archaeological Watching Brief-

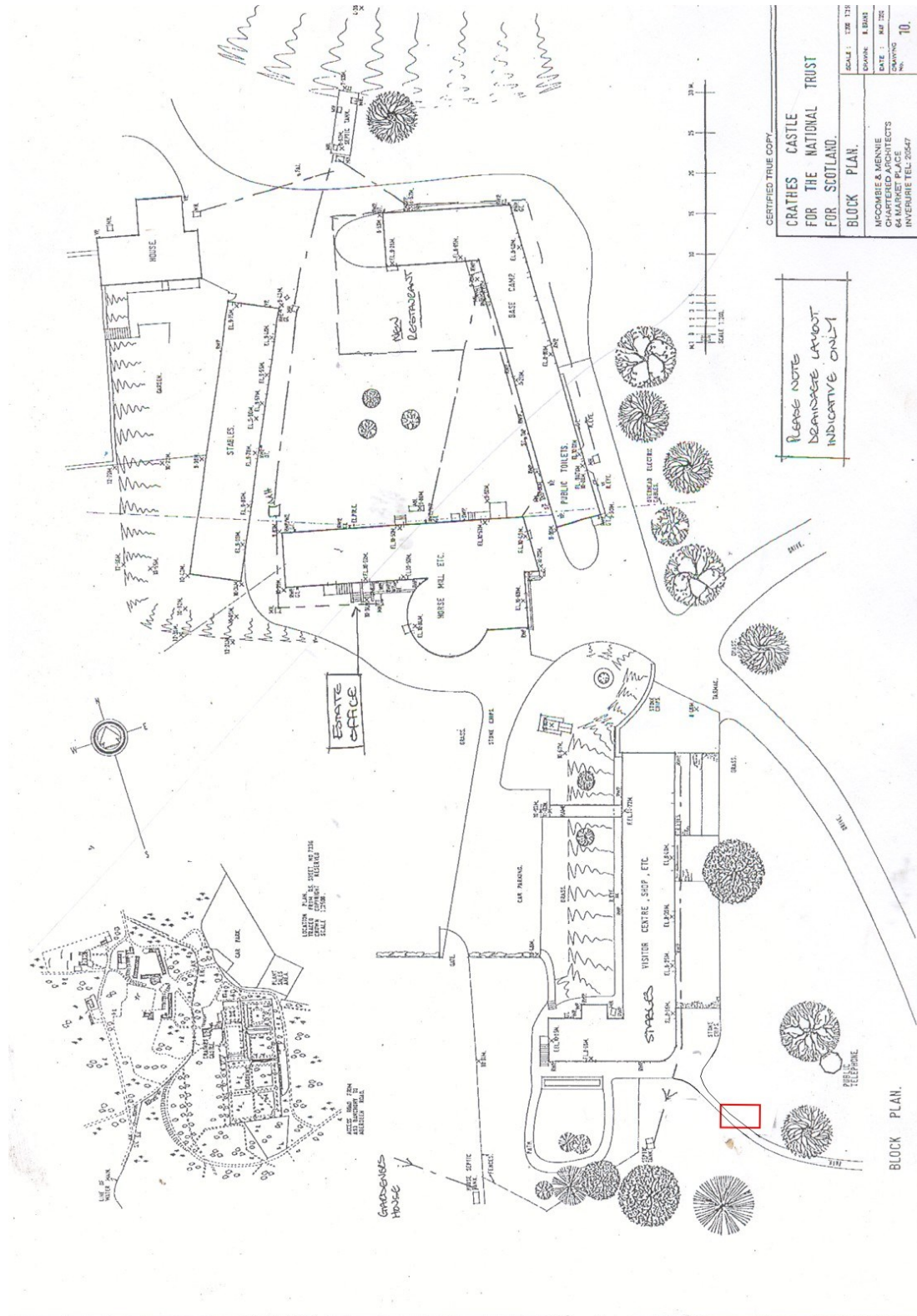
H K Murray

1. **Background**
 - 1.1 A new soakaway was required for the stables block at Crathes Castle, Aberdeenshire. As a result an archaeological watching brief was carried out to record any archaeological features that might be revealed.
 - 1.2 The watching brief was undertaken in the context of the proximity of the new soakaway to the S end of the stables buildings which are thought to be of early 19th-century date as they appear in their present form on an estate plan of 1838. A 1798 estate map gives some indication that there might have been an earlier building on or near the site of the stable S wing (Wright, 2004, 5). A further consideration was the presence of known prehistoric archaeology in the estate such as the timber hall and pit alignment in Warren Field and the more ephemeral evidence in the Overflow Car Park near the gardens and in Milton Wood opposite the Warren Field (Murray, Murray and Fraser, 2009). Clearly a ridge such as the one on which the stables are situated could have been attractive in terms of prehistoric activity.
 - 1.3 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland to undertake the work; the field element of which was carried out on 20th February 2012.
2. **The Site**
 - 2.1 The site lies to the SE of the SE corner of the stable block, the nearest corner of the pit being 11.1m from the corner of the stable and 9.2m E of the hedge. As electricity/telecom cables were found just below the surface to the S of the

path down to the castle, the pit was located to the N of and partially crossing the line of the path.

Parish: Banchory-Ternan. NGR: NO 73372 96826

NMRS No: NO79NW 8.12



Illus 1 Location of soakaway (red outline)



Illus 2 Location of soakaway in relation to castle, looking SE



Illus 3 Soakaway in relation to stables, looking N

3 Methodology

- 3.1 The soakaway pit was dug by a mini- digger; a straight-edged bucket was used for the upper horizons but the lower horizons required to be dug with a toothed bucket. When the upper levels had been excavated across the pit a small central test pit was excavated to depth to test the suitability of the underlying natural. Then the remainder of the pit was excavated to a depth of c. 1.6m. The excavation of the pit was observed, planned and photographed by MAS Ltd.

4. The Results

The pit was 5 x 3m with the long axis running WNW/ESE. Below the grass there was a layer of topsoil to a maximum depth 250-300mm. This lay above 250-300mm of loose redeposited gravel/ stone natural with occasional inclusions of slate or brick fragments. This had been placed over a loamy layer of maximum c. 300mm depth which appeared to be the original topsoil. This overlay the undisturbed natural which comprised a band of compact boulder clay at the S edge of the pit but was looser stoney material with large fractured glacial boulders over most of the pit base. No archaeological features or artefacts were observed.

5. Discussion

No archaeological features or finds were observed. It is probable that the redeposited natural derived from the excavation to insert the 'onion' septic tank to the W of the present pit.

6. References

- Murray, H K, Murray, J C & Fraser, S M 2009 *A Tale of the unknown unknowns: a Mesolithic pit alignment and a Neolithic timber hall at Warren Field, Crathes, Aberdeenshire*, Oxbow Books, Oxford.
- Wright, A P K 2004 Crathes Castle Courtyard: Heritage Impact Assessment. Unpublished report for the National Trust for Scotland.



Illus 4 S section of soakaway showing buried topsoil below redeposited natural and imported topsoil.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Catalogue of digital photographic record (on CD)

Photographic catalogue Crathes Castle Stables Soakaway	
Digital frame no	Content
1-2	Location of pit in relation to castle, looking SE
3	Location of pit in relation to stables, looking N
4	Redeposited topsoil, looking SE
5	Central test pit to maximum depth
6	Pit to maximum depth showing buried topsoil. S section

