

NEW ELLON ACADEMY SITE
ELLON
ABERDEENSHIRE



Archaeological Evaluation
Carried out August 2012
by
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2012-17
by
H K Murray and J C 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

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-Archaeological Evaluation -

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1. Background

- 1.1 A Planning Application (APP/2011/3757) was granted permission for the erection a new Ellon Academy on a green field site at Cromleybank, Ellon, Aberdeenshire.

An archaeological condition was applied to this application in the context of Scottish Planning Policy (PAN 2/2011, SPP, SHEP).

The condition required that no development should take place before the implementation of a 7-10% archaeological evaluation.

- 1.2 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council to undertake the work.

- 1.3 The evaluation was undertaken between 13th and 21st August 2012.

2. The Site

- 2.1 The site lay on the S side of the town of Ellon, Aberdeenshire on part of the lands of Cromleybank Farm between the A90 road and the B9005 road. The two W parts of the site were in grass at the time of evaluation. The E area was predominantly tree-covered with much of the planting dating from 1989 after the widening of the A90 but with a few mature trees along the margins.

Parish: Ellon. NGR: NJ 9691, 2982 (centre of evaluation site)

- 2.2 The site, which is generally fairly level, lies along a gravel ridge at c. 15m OD and between 150 and 250m of the S side of the river Ythan. It is overlooked by higher ground to the S and W. At the N limit of the site, the ground slopes quite distinctly down to a lower terrace above the Ythan flood plain.



Illus 1 General view across site looking NW

3 Methodology

- 3.1 The cultivated topsoil was removed by a full slew excavator with a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. Any possible features were cleaned and excavated by hand.
- 3.2 All mapping was done with a Magellan Mobile Mapper CX.

4. Historical Background

- 4.1 A desktop survey had not been part of the original brief. However, following the results of the evaluation a basic background search of easily available map and archive material has been undertaken.

4.2 Map evidence

Roy's Military map 1747-55

Roy shows the area partly enclosed with rig and furrow marked.

1st Ordnance Survey Map. 1867 (published 1871)

Aberdeenshire sheet xxxviii.1

The area of the site is shown as improved cultivated lands. The present layout was established. However the cottages to the S of the W field had not been built and on the site of the cottages to the S of the central field, there was a larger farm named Fechil. Within the central field, there was an additional N/S dyke between the road and the gateway to the centre of Fechil Wood. An E/W dyke across this same field formed a small enclosure around Fechil Farm. The mature beech trees between the central field and the wooded E part of the site can be seen as part of an Avenue relating to Fechil Farm as can the beech trees and dyke alongside the old road to the N of Evaluation trench 19.

Ordnance survey 1899 (published 1900)

Aberdeenshire sheet 038.16

Fechil Farm had been reduced to the cottages present today. The E/W dyke across the central field has been removed. The W cottages have been built.

5 Results of the Evaluation

Nineteen evaluation trenches were excavated in total, eighteen within the area of the two grass fields at the W and centre of the site. An additional small trench (Trench 19) was excavated to the S of the old road from Fechil Farm (Illus 2).

Evaluation trenches were not possible within the E wooded part of the site but a series of test pits undertaken for Fairhurst in this area were observed and confirmed that much of the area had been stripped at the time of the A90 widening c. 1989. The extent of tree cover even in the less disturbed areas would indicate little possibility of the survival of archaeological features, although stray finds could be encountered.

Trench 1

GPS NE end: 396996, 829883

SW end: 396923, 829748

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 153 m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil c. 500mm at SW but c. 300mm for most of trench. In general this overlay stony gravels with a ridge of boulders for the N 30m of the trench.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench, most easily visible between 396947, 829788 and 396955, 829803

Trench 2

GPS NE end: 396977, 829894 SW end: 396904, 829758

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 153m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 400-500mm at S end reducing to 270-300mm for the rest of the trench. Gentle slope of natural stony gravels down to N at the N 40m of the trench.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench, most easily visible between 396941, 829826 and 396945, 829895.

Small amount of 20th century midden material was found behind the cottages at Fechil. A disturbed area 20-25m from the S end of the trench may derive from clearance of the Fechil farm buildings in the late 19th century.

Trench 3

GPS NE end: 396956, 829903 SW end: 396863, 829724

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 201m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: At the S half of the trench topsoil depths were 300-350mm. Between c 150 and 170m from S end of trench there was a dip in natural to c. 450mm masked on the surface by deeper topsoil. The N end of the trench had a gradual slope down to N with topsoil of c. 300mm.

Features: None

Trench 4

GPS NE end: 396936, 829920 SW end: 396843, 829734

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 207m Width: 2.0m

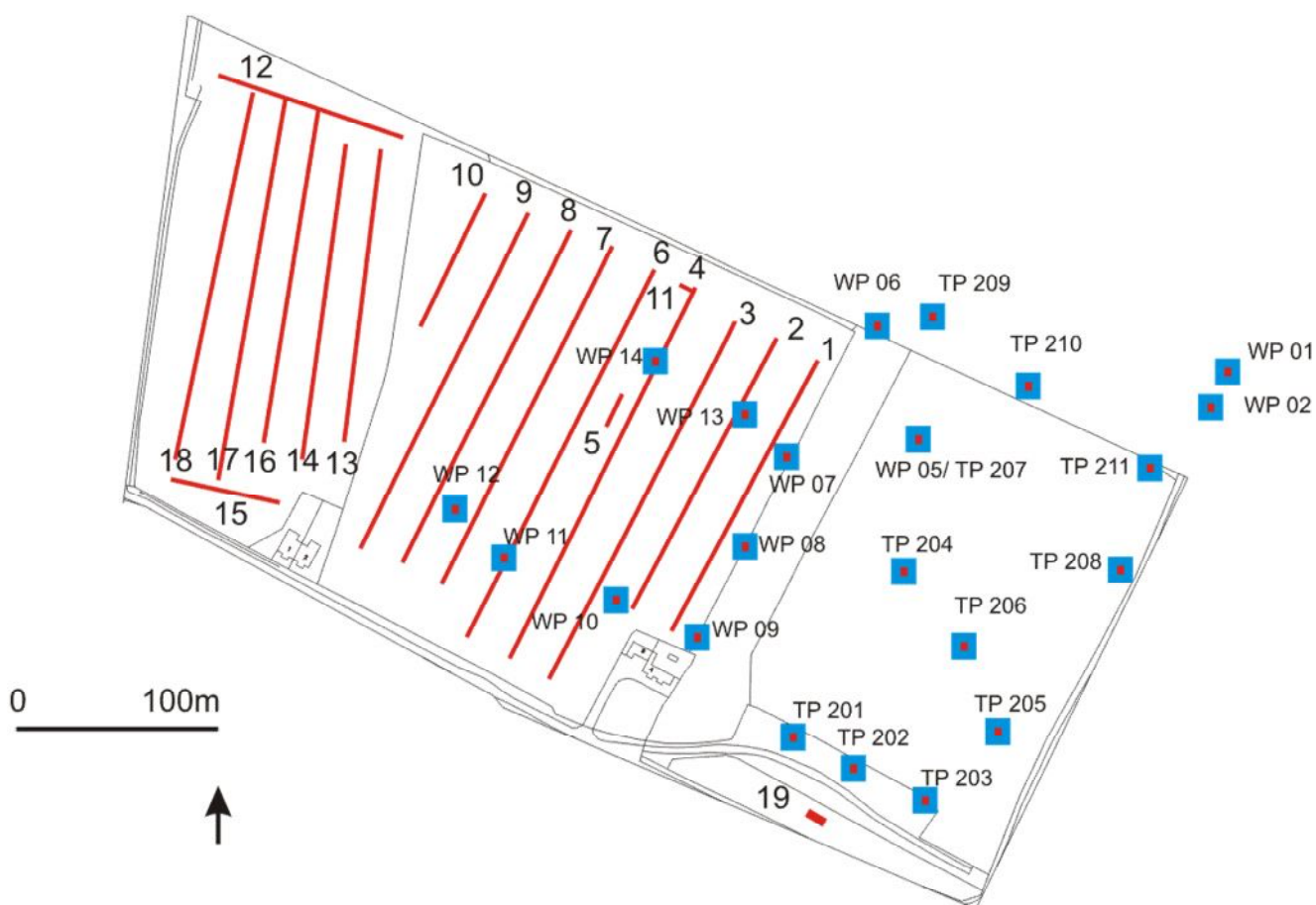
Stratigraphy: Topsoil at the S end of the trench was c 370mm over clay natural in a slight dip. By 40m from the S end the natural had risen and was level for much of the trench, being stony gravels below 300mm topsoil. There was a very rocky band of boulders in the gravel from c 50m from the N end, with the natural dipping sharply some

20m from the N end where the natural was at a depth of c 500mm with c. 80mm dark peaty soil below the topsoil and above the natural.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench, most easily visible between 396876, 829802 and 396881, 829881.

Finds: SF 1, 2, 3, 5.

Two areas focussed around the finds were cleaned by hand but no features were apparent. Trenches 5 and 11 were also placed to check if there was any more extensive spread of finds near these areas.



Illus 2 The site showing all evaluation trenches (red) and test pits (blue). Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 1000410404

Trench 5

GPS NE end: 396902, 828867 SW end: 396892, 829849

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 20m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 400mm deep to stony gravel natural.

Features: None

Trench 6

GPS NE end: 396915, 829928 SW end: 396823, 829744

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 207m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: The S 30m of the trench formed a slight dip with clay natural and c 380mm of topsoil. There were two other dips at 50 and 100m from the S end, where topsoil depths of c 500-550mm masked the dip on the surface, elsewhere topsoil depths were between 270 and 300mm. The band of boulders seen in other trenches extended N from c 120m from the S end of the trench with the natural dipping sharply some 20m from the N end where the natural was at a depth of c 600mm with c. 100mm dark peaty soil below the topsoil and above the natural.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench, with at least 4 furrows visible between 396855, 829812 and 396911, 829921.

Finds: SF 4, which possibly derived from the edge of the most northerly rig and furrow.

Trench 7

GPS NE end: 396895, 829940 SW end: 396810, 829771

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 200m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: The S 27m of the trench formed a slight dip with c 400mm of topsoil. For most of the trench the topsoil was 270-300mm in depth above stony gravel natural, with the exception of a dip between 84 and 94m from the S end where homogenous cultivated topsoil was 600-650mm in depth.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench, with at least 3 furrows visible between 396818, 829783 and 396878, 829907.

Trench 8

GPS NE end: 396875, 829948 SW end: 396791, 829781

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 186m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 270- 350mm deep for most of trench overlay stony gravels, deepening to c. 500mm at c 140m from S end of trench.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench between 396842, 829876 and 396847, 829892.



Illus 3 Trench 8, looking N. Ranging rod lies along trace of furrow of rig and furrow.

Trench 9

GPS NE end: 396853,829956 SW end: 396770, 829789

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 186m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep over stony gravels for most of trench, with a dip to c 500mm at the S end of the trench where there was clay natural. The natural at the N half of the trench was full of large boulders from 90m from S end.

Features: None

Finds: SF 6.

Trench 10

GPS NE end: 396832, 829965 SW end: 396800, 829899

Orientation: NE/SW Length: 73m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench above stony gravel natural. Deepened to 500mm at c 35m from S end.

Features: Rig and furrow roughly N/S across the trench between 396809, 829918 and 396815, 829929.

Trench 11

GPS NW end: 396929, 829925 SE end: 396932, 829920

Orientation: NW/SE Length: 5 m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep over gravel natural.

Features: None.

Trench 12

GPS NW end: 396700, 830024 SE end: 396792, 829994

Orientation: NW/SE Length: 96 m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300- 350mm deep for most of trench with 600mm of topsoil in N/S dip between 396776, 829998 and 396768, 830001 (which continued S in Trench 14).

Features: None

Trench 13

GPS N end: 396780, 829988 S end: 396761, 829841

Orientation: Approx N/S Length: 147m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep for most of trench but deepened to 780mm between 107m and 115m from the S end. There was another dip to 700mm at c. 40m from the S end.

Features: Possible rig and furrow between 39676, 829972 and 396777, 829969.

Finds SF 8.

Trench 14

GPS N end: 396763, 829990 S end: 396741, 829833

Orientation: Approx N/S Length: 159m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil depths varied considerably. For most of the N 50m of the trench there was a roughly N/S gully 500-750mm deep (see Trench 12), filled with topsoil over very stony natural gravel with many boulders, up to 1.5m in length. To the S of this the ground rose gently to the gravel ridge with topsoil depths of 270-300mm, with a slight deepening at the S end, where depths were c. 400mm.

Features: None



Illus 4 Trench 14 looking N showing depth of deposits and large boulders in natural

Trench 15

GPS NW end: 396674, 829825

SE end: 396731, 829812

Orientation: NW/SE Length: 57m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300mm deep at E end, 500mm deep at W end over natural which ranged from sandy clay to gravel.

Features: None

Trench 16

GPS N end: 396749, 830008

S end: 396722, 829841

Orientation: Approx N/S Length: 170 m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 300 - 350mm deep for most of trench with dips at 50m from the S end where the topsoil was 600mm deep and at 75-85m from the S end where it was 800mm deep.

Features: None

Trench 17

GPS N end: 396732, 830008

S end: 396700, 829822

Orientation: Approx N/S Length: 190m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 270-350mm deep for most of trench with a gradual dip to 600mm between 70 and 130m from S end..

Features: None

Finds: SF 9

Trench 18

GPS N end: 396715, 830009 S end: 396678, 829832

Orientation: Approx N/S Length: 181m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 270-350mm deep for most of trench with dips at 67m and 120m from the S end, where the topsoil was between 500 and 600mm deep.

Features: None

Trench 19

GPS NWend: 396995, 829653 SE end: 397004, 829653

Orientation: NW/SE Length: 13 m Width: 2.0m

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 400-500mm deep overlay clay natural.

Features: None

Test pits

A total of 22 engineering test pits undertaken by Fairhurst were observed, 8 in the E field between the evaluation trenches and 14 in the wooded area to the E. The locations are shown on plan (illus 2) and in table 1. TP pits were c 2 x 2.5m and up to 3m deep, WPs were c 2 x 2m and generally c. 1m deep.

No archaeological finds or features were evident in any of the test pits.



Illus 5 Machine digging test pits in wooded area

Test pits TP 201, TP 202, TP 203, TP 204, TP 205, TP 206, TP 208 and TP 211 all had evidence of soil having been removed and other soil backfilled. This appears to confirm the belief that much of this area was used as a borrow pit for gravel during the widening of the adjacent section of the A90 road c. 1989. This would have removed any archaeological features.

Test pit No	Easting	Northing
TP201	396983	829696
TP 202	397012	829678
TP203	397050	829663
TP204	397038	829779
TP205	397088	829714
TP 206	397067	829739
TP 207	397048	829837
TP 208	397147	829781
TP 209	397052	829904
TP 210	397100	829870
TP 211	397157	829832
WP 01	397198	829877
WP 02	397188	829860
WP 03 = TP208		
WP 05 = TP 207		
WP 06	397025	829888
WP 07	396982	829831
WP 08	396957	829790
WP 09	396934	829745
WP 10	396895	829760
WP 11	396840	829785
WP 12	396817	829811
WP 13	396959	829857
WP 14	396915	829882

Table 1 Co-ordinates of test pits



Illus 6 Test pit TP 208 showing redeposited infill material backfilled into borrow pit

7 The Finds

Small Finds

All finds from the evaluation and excavation were catalogued (Appendix 2) and marked on plan (Illus 7).

Prehistoric

A total of four flints and 1 sherd of undiagnostic prehistoric pottery were recovered. The pottery (1) and two of the flints (3,5) were fairly close together but hand cleaning of the trench revealed no associated features, nor were any further finds discovered in trenches 5 and 11 which were focussed on this area.

Medieval

Four sherds of medieval pottery were recovered; all were fairly abraded and can not be closely dated but are in the range 13th-15th century. The traces of rig and furrow may be of any date from the medieval period to the 18th century. Rig is shown on Roy's map of the area in 1747-55.



Illus 7. Location of finds. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 1000410404

8 Discussion

Prehistoric

The very small number of finds from such a large area of evaluation suggests that any activity on this ridge was marginal- possibly activities such as herding stock, gathering fuel, wood for construction or other plant materials. It is in marked contrast to the concentrations of flints of possible Mesolithic to Bronze Age date found nearer the river around Boat of Fechil (SMR NJ93SE0009 (NJ9757 3009), NJ 93SE0042 (NJ 9694

3014) and NJ93SE0043 (NJ 9720 3017)) and the flint knapping sites at Hill of Logie (SMR NJ92NE0016 (NJ 9782 2976) and Craig Starcie (NJ 9744 3017). Neolithic stone axes have also been found in the area of the wood of Fechil (SMR: NJ 93SE0018 and NJ 93SE0060 (NJ 9700 3000).

The lie of the landscape suggests that the lower ridge directly along the N margin of the W field- the ridge which continues below the Fechil wood- could have been a likely focus for settlement, lying just above the river's flood plain. Although the lower ridge has also been extensively cultivated, there is some potential for survival in this area with the probability of downhill soil creep. This area is outside the Academy site but within the wider development area.

Medieval

The small number of abraded medieval sherds are likely to derive from midden manuring of fields on the outskirts of Ellon.

9 Impacts and Mitigations

Impacts There was a very small finds assemblage and no evidence of surviving archaeology.

Mitigations

1. Any works related to the Academy site on the lower N terrace outwith the bounds of the main site, such as the Suds Basin shown on plans or works associated with access to the proposed new footbridge, should be subject to an archaeological watching brief as it would appear possible that there could be surviving archaeology in these areas.
2. The lack of surviving archaeology within the evaluation area does not preclude the possibility of chance finds or archaeological discoveries outwith the evaluation trenches. Should such chance finds occur, then the Archaeology Service, Aberdeenshire Council, or Murray Archaeological Services Ltd, must be informed immediately so that an appropriate archaeological response can be formulated and agreed by all parties concerned.

10 References

Roy. Military Map of 1747-55 on line at <http://www.nls.uk/maps>

Acknowledgements

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank David Reid of Cromleybank for his interest and help during the site work.

Appendices

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

Digital frame number	Content
Ellon Academy 1	
1-3	Trench 1
4-6	Views across trenches 1 and 2 looking across the Ythan to the N.
7-9	Trench 9
10	View looking SE
11-12	Traces of furrows of rig and furrow in trench 8
13-18	Looking N and W across central field
Ellon Academy 2	
1-2	Trench 12
3-6	Trench 14
Ellon Academy test pits	
1-3	General of machine in wooded E area
4-9	Test pit TP 205
10-16	TP 208

Appendix 2: Catalogue of small finds

SF number	Description	Trench	GPS	Context	Possible date
1	1 sherd (2 frags) very coarse pottery	4	396902,829851	Base of topsoil on natural	prehistoric
2	Body sherd, possibly base. Beige fine sandy fabric. Concentric rims from throwing on internal surface with faint traces of green glaze	4	396904,829856	Base of topsoil on natural	medieval
3	Flint scraper with secondary working along one edge. L: 35mm. W: 28mm. Th:10mm	4	396933,829914	Base of topsoil on natural	
4	Body sherd. Thick, probably base of handle. External orange glaze on red micaceous fine fabric. Possible Scottish redware	6	396910,829923	Base of topsoil on natural. At edge rig and furrow	medieval
5	Flint flake	4	396933,829917	Base of topsoil on natural	
6	Body sherd.	9	396801,829848	Base of	medieval

	Abraded. Micaceous red fabric			topsoil on natural	
7	Burnt flint flake	10	396819,829940	Base of topsoil on natural	
8	Body sherd, abraded. Reddish fine sandy fabric, faint traces external green glaze	13	396777,829963	Base of topsoil on natural	medieval
9	Part of flint pebble	17	396715,829916	Base of topsoil on natural	