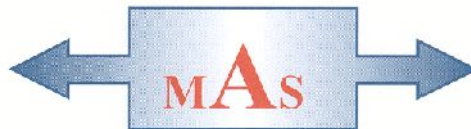


GARDEN WALL PITMEDDEN HOUSE ABERDEENSHIRE



- Test pits and watching brief -
Carried out 18th -23rd March 2016
by
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2016-5
by
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PITMEDDEN HOUSE ABERDEENSHIRE GARDEN WALL

-Test pits and Archaeological Watching Brief-

1. Background

- 1.1 The SW corner of the 17th-century garden wall at Pitmedden House, Pitmedden, Udney Parish, Aberdeenshire (NJ 8844 2805) had become hazardous and required remedial work. As this would involve some invasive works both to the wall and to the ground alongside it, the National Trust for Scotland required a watching brief on the ground investigation and consolidations works.
- 1.2 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by David Chouman on behalf of the National Trust for Scotland to undertake the work; the recording was carried out March 2016.

2. The Site

- 2.1 The garden wall, dated c1675 by the date stone over the gateway in the W end of the S wall, is a Category A listed building (MacGowan and Addyman, 2007, vol ii, 21, B01).

The section of wall under consideration is the S end of the W wall from the SW corner (illus 17).

Parish: Udney

NGR: NJ 88439 27981 (beside the section of wall under consolidation).

NMRS No: NJ82NE 33

3 Methodology

- 3.1 Test pits were required for the base of the wall and the underlying soil to be examined. 5 test pits were dug by hand to the level of the bottom of the lowest course of stones.
- 3.2 The wall face was examined for any old nails or other features.

4. Background

The garden wall is generally dated to 1675 on the basis of the datestone over the doorway in the S wall, near the SW corner. The loss of any pre-1800 estate records and maps in the fire which destroyed the house in 1807 (not as previously thought 1818) (MacGowan and Addyman, 2007), means there is no documentary evidence of the process of the wall construction, or of any repairs.

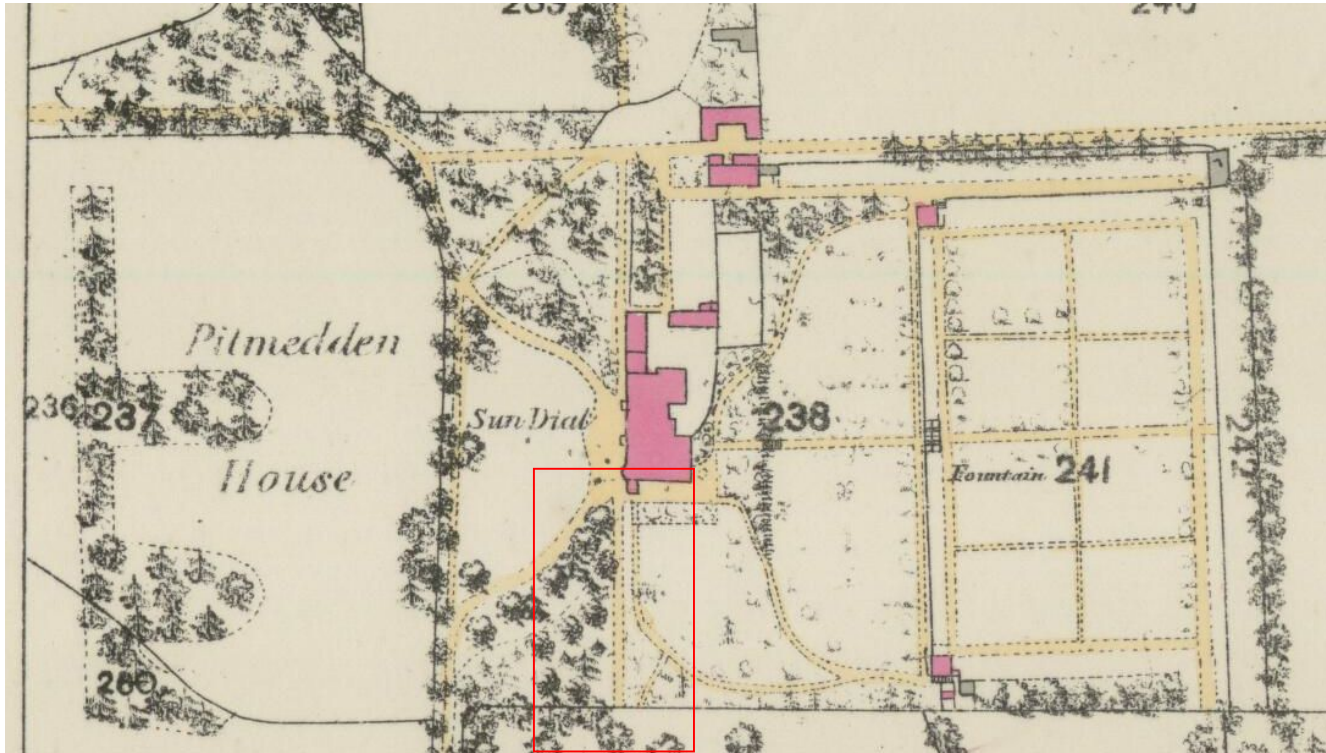
The first visual reference for the section of the wall between the house and the SW corner is a pencil sketch dated 1839 (NTS archive in HLS: MacGowan and Addyman, 2007) which depicts the ruins after the fire of 1807. This shows the wall abutting the SW corner of the house. It extends towards the SW corner- without a gateway near the house.



Illus 1 Pencil sketch of house 1839 (after fire of 1807), showing wall (NTS archive from HLS)

The ruins of the house were demolished and the present house built in the 1860s. The 1st OS map of 1867 (both 25"/mile (illus 2) and 6"/mile (illus 3)) shows the footprint of the new building. It also shows the S wall of the garden as a dark line. Paths are shown on either side of the line of the W wall but the wall itself is not drawn. One explanation would be an error by the OS draughtsmen. However it is also possible that this section of the wall may have been reduced during the 1860s demolition (clearly the end abutting the house would have been).

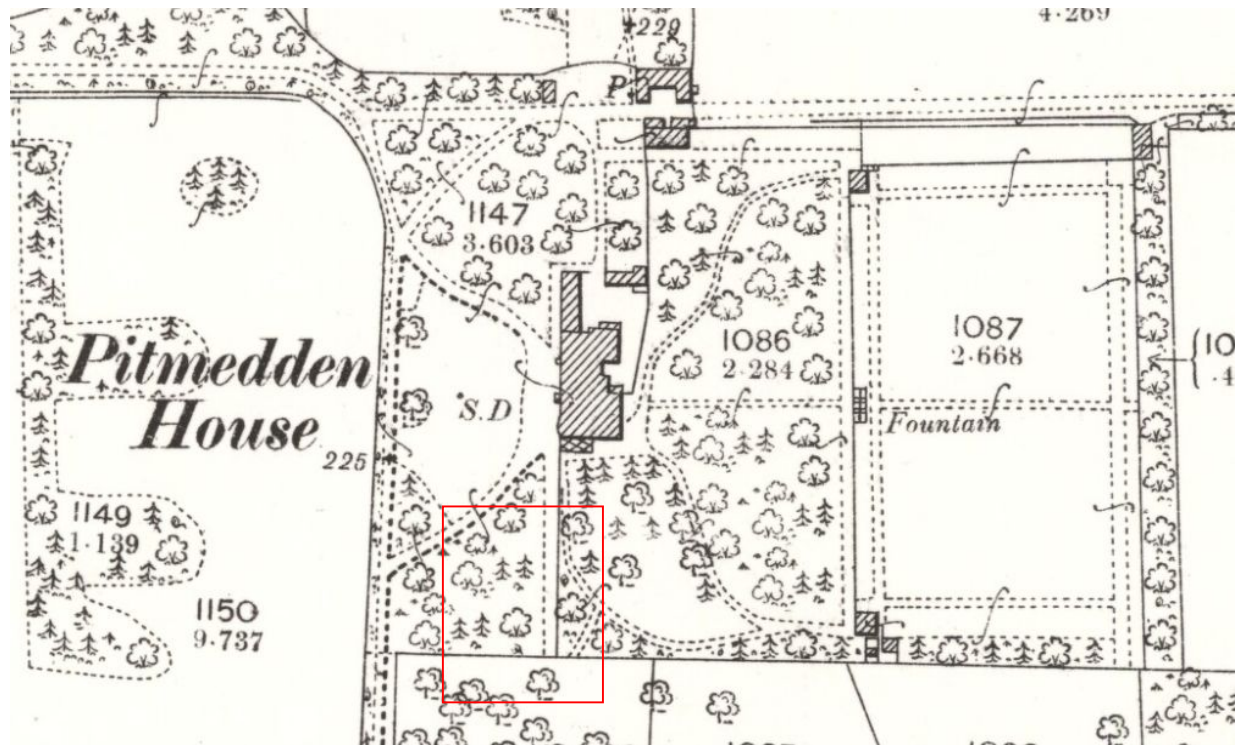
By the 1899 2nd OS map (illus 4) this section of wall is drawn, either indicating a correction to the map- or that this section of the wall was rebuilt in the late 1860s. A family photograph of 1920 (NTS archive photo 0311 from HLS) which shows the end of the wall near the house, shows it by this stage to be heavily covered in ivy.



Illus 2 Detail from OS 25''/mile Aberdeen sheet xlvi.5 (Udny) 1867 (pub 1870). (www.nls.ac.uk)



Illus 3 Detail from OS 6''/mile Aberdeen sheet xlvi. 1866-7 (pub 1870). (www.nls.ac.uk)



Illus 4 Detail from Aberdeenshire sheet 47 25"/mile 1899 (pub 1900). (www.nls.ac.uk)

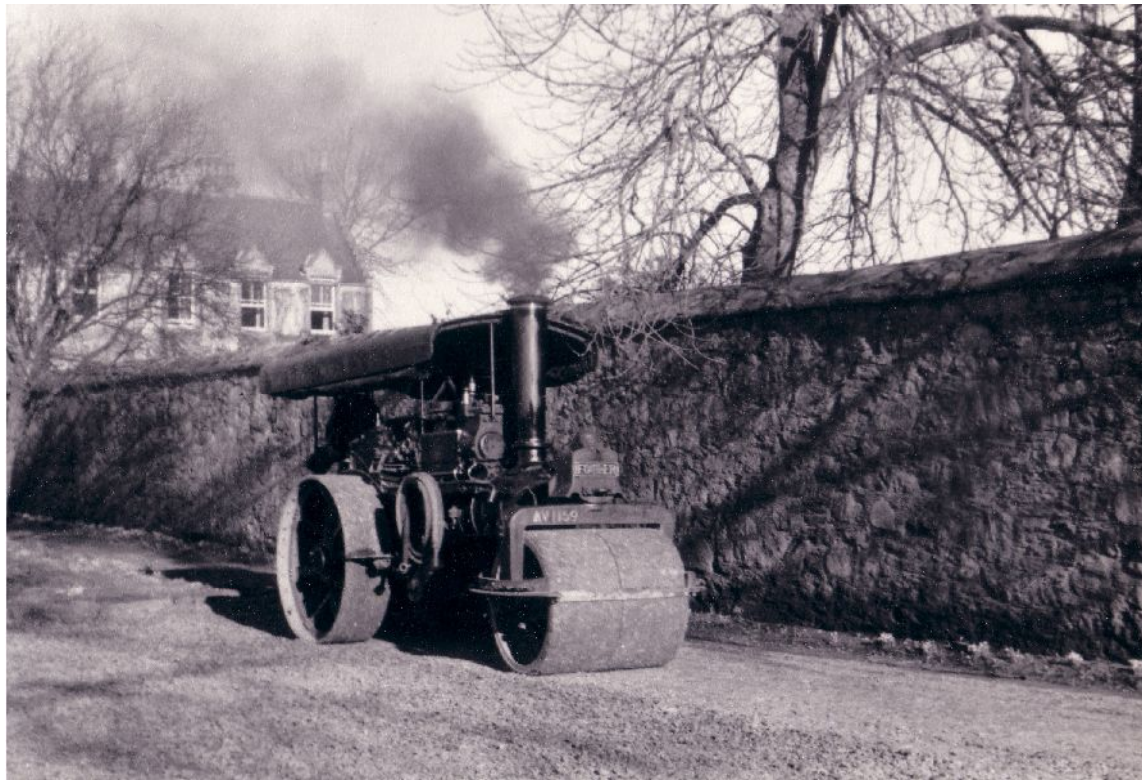
After the National Trust for Scotland took over the property in 1952, works were undertaken to allow public access. A photograph from 1957 during the creation of the car park looks along the line of the drystone dyke that formed the W continuation of the S wall line (illus 5). The gateway in the S wall and the SW corner of the wall are clear.



Illus 5 Road to car park 1957, showing the SW corner with drystone dyke continuing the S wall line W. (NTS archive photo 0340 from HLS)



Illus 6 Major earthworks removing the drystone dyke 1961 (NTS archive photo 0366 from HLS)



Illus 7 Road roller beside walled garden 1961 (NTS archive photo 0368 from HLS)

Photographs from 1961 (NTS archive photos 0366, 0368 from HLS) show the removal of the drystone dyke (illus 6) and a road roller compacting the pathway alongside the W face of the W wall. The ivy has been cut away from the wall. One, possibly two, trees can be seen on the E side of the wall. The pathway appears to be gravel or similar.



Illus 8 View along the W face of the W wall, looking towards the house. 2016 during remedial work on the wall

5. The Watching brief

The watching brief was applied in the context of remedial works being undertaken on the S end of the W wall where a number of cracks were apparent and where the wall was bulging on the outer face. The project was designed by David Chouman, Architect and the work was directed by John Addison of Addison Conservation and Design, Consulting Engineers and undertaken by Steven Harper of Harper and Allan Masonry.

A number of test pits (illus 18) were excavated at the base of the wall to establish the nature of the ground below the wall and the depth of the foundations. As part of the process of stabilisation, the horizontal cracks in the inner face were wedged while pressure was placed on the outer face of the wall to straighten it; photographs were taken at the beginning of this process.



Illus 9 W wall looking N from SW corner showing bulges



Illus 10 Inner face of W wall looking S, showing wedges placed in cracks before wall straightened

Inner face of W wall

Five test pits were excavated along the inner, E face of the wall. All showed the wall stones set on the surface of natural clay. There was no evidence of a wall cut within the width of the test pits. The depth of garden earth deepened from 350mm

at the S end to 700mm from c 10m to the N. There were no finds of any archaeological significance.

Test pit 1

Between 3.25m and 4.8m from inner corner of the wall. W: 500mm.

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 350mm over natural clay.

Test pit 2

Between 5.6m and 7.4m from inner corner of wall. W:500mm.

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 470-500mm over natural clay. The topsoil included occasional fragments of slate, plant pot etc. Some mortar fragments on top of natural clay. Wall stones set on the clay.



Illus 11 Test pit 2 showing base of wall on top of clay

Test pit 3

Between 8.5m and 10.3m from inner corner of wall. W: 500mm.

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 600mm over natural clay. Stones set on the clay.



Illus 12 Test pit 3 showing base of wall on clay

Test pit 4

Between 10.8m and 12.3m from inner corner of wall. W: 500mm.

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 700mm over natural clay.

Test pit 5

Between 13m and 14.1m from inner corner of wall. W:500mm.

Stratigraphy: Topsoil 700mm over natural clay. Some water at base.

Outer face of W wall

Three pits were excavated along the outer W face of the wall. Test pits 6 and 7 were beside the parts of the wall where there were apparent problems (TP 6 was below the main bulge in the wall). Test pit 8 however was placed further N beside an area of the wall where there were no problems; this was to provide a possible comparison.

Test pit 6

Between 11.2m and 11.5m from outer corner of wall. W: 300mm.

Stratigraphy: Beside the wall there was a layer of c100mm of gravel covering an edging stone set flush with the wall face. The edging stone was set directly on natural clay. The clay was excavated to 800mm below the present path surface.

The wall had been cut into the clay.

Test pit 7

Between 13.9m and 14.6m from outer corner of wall. W: 300mm.

Stratigraphy: Beside the wall there was a layer of c100mm of gravel covering an edging stone set flush with the wall face. The edging stone was set on a thin layer of topsoil over natural clay. The base of the wall was 750mm below present path surface. The wall had been cut 400mm into the natural clay.



Illus 13 Test pit 7 showing wall cut into clay

Test pit 8

Between 21.3m and 22.15m from outer corner of wall. A small sondage 300mm wide was excavated beside the wall face but a wider area (1m x 0.50m) was excavated, below the path after the removal of two paving slabs.

Stratigraphy: Beside the wall there was a layer of c100mm of gravel covering an edging stone set flush with the wall face. Below the edging stone there was c150mm humic garden soil above natural clay. The clay was excavated to the base of the wall which was cut 300mm into the clay.



Illus 14 Test pit 8 showing wall cut into clay and path edging stones flush against wall face

The wider area showed a cobbled path survives c 180mm below the paving stones of the present path. The cobbles extend up to the edging stones and were tightly locked against them, suggesting that the edging was laid first, flush to the wall face, and then the cobbling laid. The cobbles were covered by red and black burnt material, suggesting that they were the pathway that was in use at the time of the fire in 1807. A telephone cable had been laid along the top of the cobbles, below a band of concrete. The scaffolders had cut this cable, so a repair cable was partly lying on the ground surface.



Illus 15 Test pit 8 showing burning on cobbled path below modern slabs.

6. Discussion

This section of the wall appears to have been constructed with its outer face built against a cut into the natural clay; this did not appear to have been a wall trench. John Addison noted that this section of the wall was buttressed on its inner face, being c 850mm across at the base and 600mm at the top. The reason for the buttressing was not clear, nor was there any fault in the underlying ground to indicate why the wall had bulged on the outer face.



Illus 16 Looking S along W wall with earlier cobbled path in test pit 8 in foreground

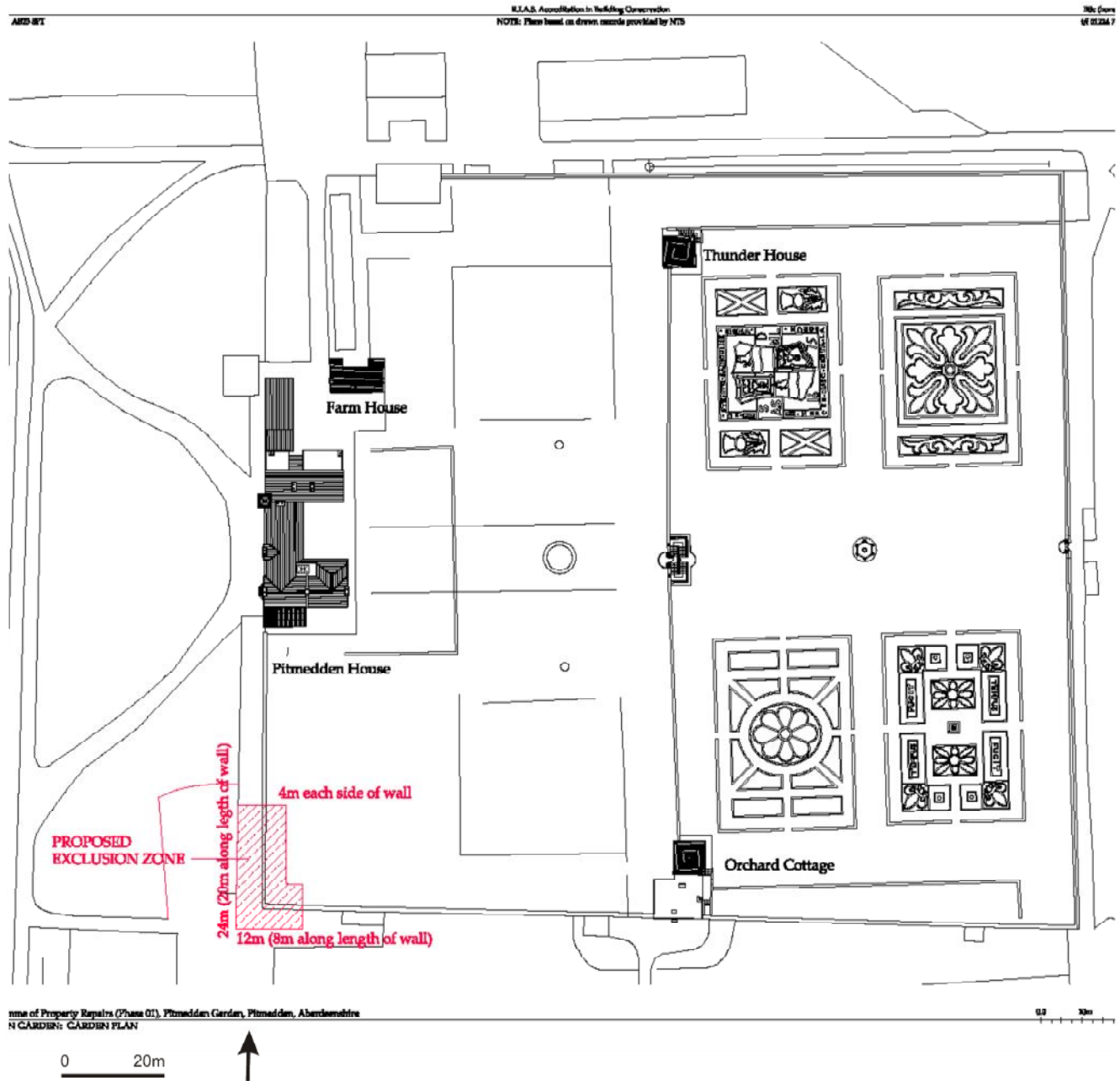
A section of cobbled path pre-dating the 1807 fire at Pitmedden was exposed against the outer face of the wall. The structure of the path indicated that it was built when the wall was in situ; this suggests that at least the foundation of the wall is the 17th-century structure. There is tenuous documentary evidence to suggest that this section of the wall may have been reduced or partially dismantled and then rebuilt in the 1860s when the house was demolished and rebuilt.

References

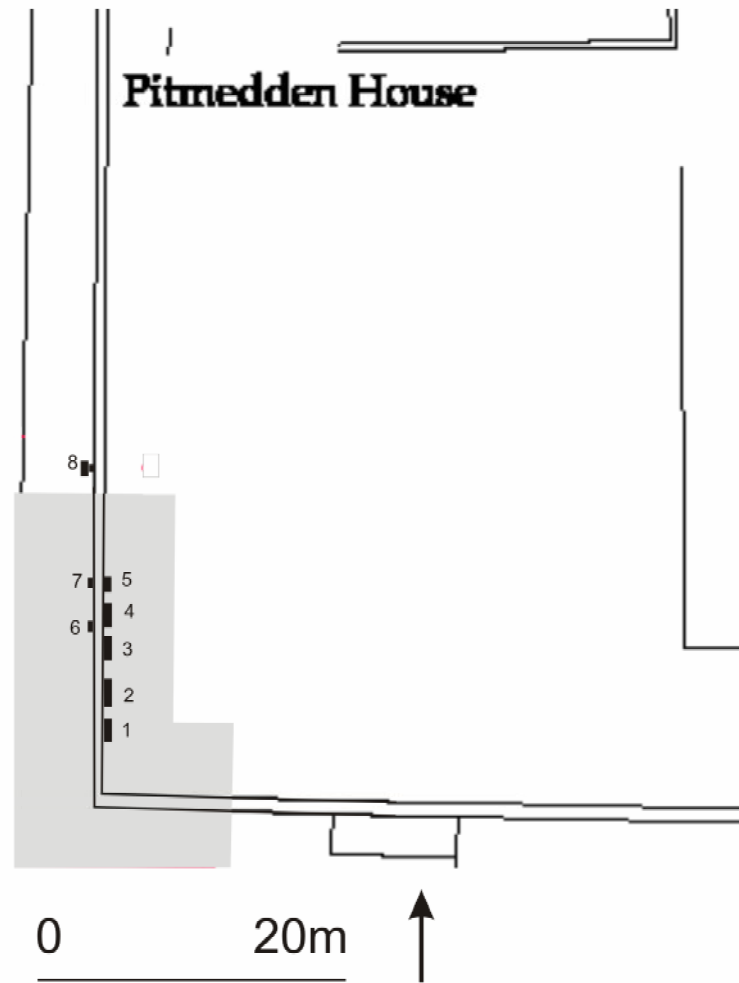
MacGowan, P. and Addyman, T. 2007. Pitmedden Historic Landscape survey.
National Trust for Scotland, unpublished report.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to David Chouman, John Addison and Steven Harper for discussion during the watching brief.



Illus 17 Location of watching brief (Plan courtesy of David Chouman).



Illus 18 Location of test pits

Appendices

Appendix 1: Catalogue of digital photographic record

Photographic catalogue Pitmedden Garden wall SW corner	
Digital frame no	Content
Pitmedden Garden wall 2016	
1-3	Test pit 2 looking SW
4-5	General view inside W wall looking S
6-10	General view inside of W wall looking W
11-13	Test pit 3
15-16	Test pit 3 extended

17-23	Outer face of W wall looking N from SW corner, showing bulges in wall face
24-28	Inner face of W wall looking S showing wedges inserted in cracks before wall straightened
29-33	Test pit 7
34-35	Outer face of W wall looking S
36-40	Test pit 8
41	Outer face of W wall looking S showing test pits
42-44	Test pit 6