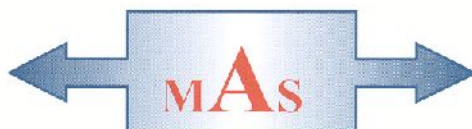


TEST PITS AND DRAINAGE 2016
LEITH HALL
ABERDEENSHIRE



Archaeological Watching Brief
Carried out November 2016
by
Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2016-32
by
H K Murray and J C Murray

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-Archaeological watching brief-

H K Murray and J C Murray

1. Background

1.1 In November 2016 two projects were being undertaken at Leith Hall, Aberdeenshire. Preliminary test pits, along the W edge of the lawn area, were being dug in preparation for the installation of mains water connection to ancillary buildings. Separately, just E of the stables, a new drain was being installed to clear lying water.

1.2 Both interventions were in an area for which there is documentary evidence for the former existence of 17th-century gardens. Dr Shannon Fraser, archaeologist for the National Trust for Scotland, determined that it was advisable to commission a watching brief on the works.

1.3 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland to undertake a watching brief on both projects on 9th November 2016.

2. The Site

2.1 Both interventions were located E of the drive between the house and the stables at Leith Hall, Aberdeenshire.

Parish: Kennethmont NGR: NJ 54086 29789

NMRS ref: No: NJ52NW4.0.

Canmore ID 17673

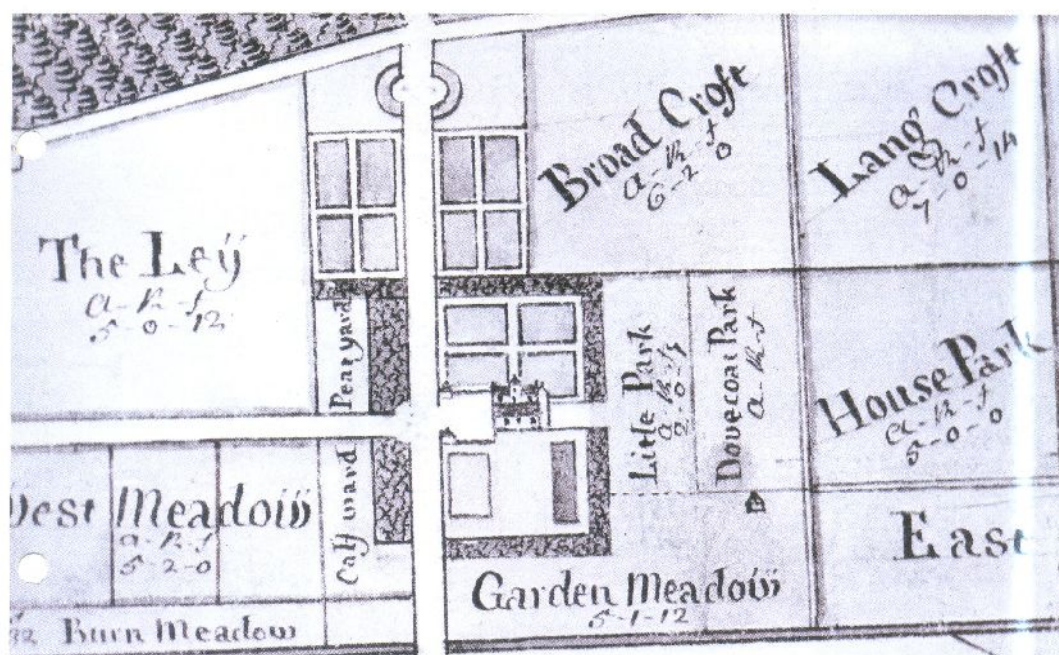
3 Methodology

- 3.1 All ground disturbance was watched, photographed and recorded.
- 3.2 All mapping was done with a Magellan Mobile Mapper 120 GPS and Glonass.

4. Documentary sources

- 4.1 The excavators are grateful to Dr Shannon Fraser for access to the main documentary information and to the images of the estate plans.
- 4.2 The main map resources for the area of the excavation have been discussed and summarised in the Leith Hall Historic Landscape Survey (HLS, 2 vols. Derek Carter Associates, 2007).
- 4.3 A map, drawn in 1758, shows a formal entrance and gardens with two small pavilions flanking the entry road to the Hall to the original W entrance. They form the two western corners of an almost square open courtyard which extends slightly more than the width of the Hall. To the N of the Hall there is a formal garden with four parterres divided by paths. The N limit of this appears to have been bounded by a bank or wall. Further N between that garden and the stables, a further garden is depicted. The bank and the more northerly garden are shown in the area of the present interventions.

Certain aspects of this map, such as the E part of the stables, which were never built, appear to have been a designed layout, rather than a completed project. However, an excavation in 2007 (Murray 2007) revealed the complete plan of the S pavilion, showing that at least part of the garden plan had been implemented. A watching brief on the fire main constructed in 2015 in the N lawn only revealed one possible gully that could perhaps be attributed to the formal gardens (Murray & Murray 2016).



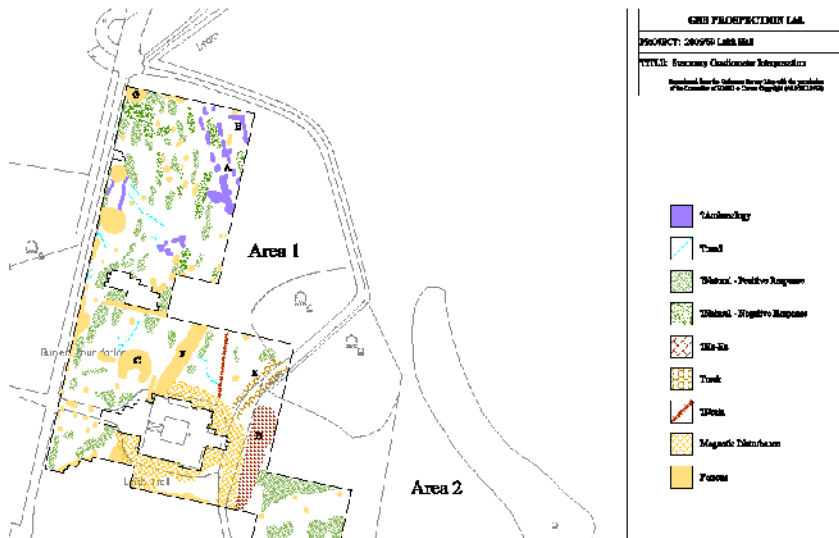
Illus 1 Detail of 1758 estate map

4.4 An Estate Map of 1797 shows that by the late 18th century any formal gardens around the house had been removed and replaced by the more open parkland and lawns that largely remain.



Illus 2 Detail of 1797 map

4.5 A geophysical survey had been undertaken in 2006 by GSB Prospection Ltd. It showed a number of anomalies in the N lawn but nothing that could be identified as traces of the formal gardens (Illus 3).



Illus 3 Detail of Summary Gradiometer Survey (fig 3) undertaken by GSB Prospection Ltd in 2006

5 Results

5.1 Test pits for water main

Test pit 1

A test pit 400mm square was dug by hand under archaeological supervision in the N lawn at GPS: 354035,829835. It was dug to a total depth of 800mm, which comprised disturbed sandy topsoil and redistributed sandy natural. This was backfill over the 2015 water main. No archaeological finds or features were observed.



Illus 3 Position of TP1



Illus 4 Detail of TP1

Test pit 2

A test pit 400mm square was dug by hand under archaeological supervision in the N lawn at GPS: 354040,829855. It was dug to a depth of 1.2m, and then cored mechanically. The stratigraphy comprised disturbed sandy topsoil c350mm deep over very compact sandy natural.

No archaeological finds or features were observed.



Illus 5 Position of TP2



Illus 6 Detail of TP2

Test pit 3

A test pit 400 x 600mm square was dug by hand under archaeological supervision in the N lawn at GPS: 354046,829894. It was dug to a depth of 1.2m, and then cored mechanically. The stratigraphy comprised disturbed sandy topsoil c350mm deep over a layer c.300mm deep of small to medium stones. These did not appear structured and were intermixed with topsoil. They were sitting above very compact sandy natural. No archaeological finds or other features were observed. The stones may have been part of a very rough path or bank but could not be further interpreted in such a small test pit.



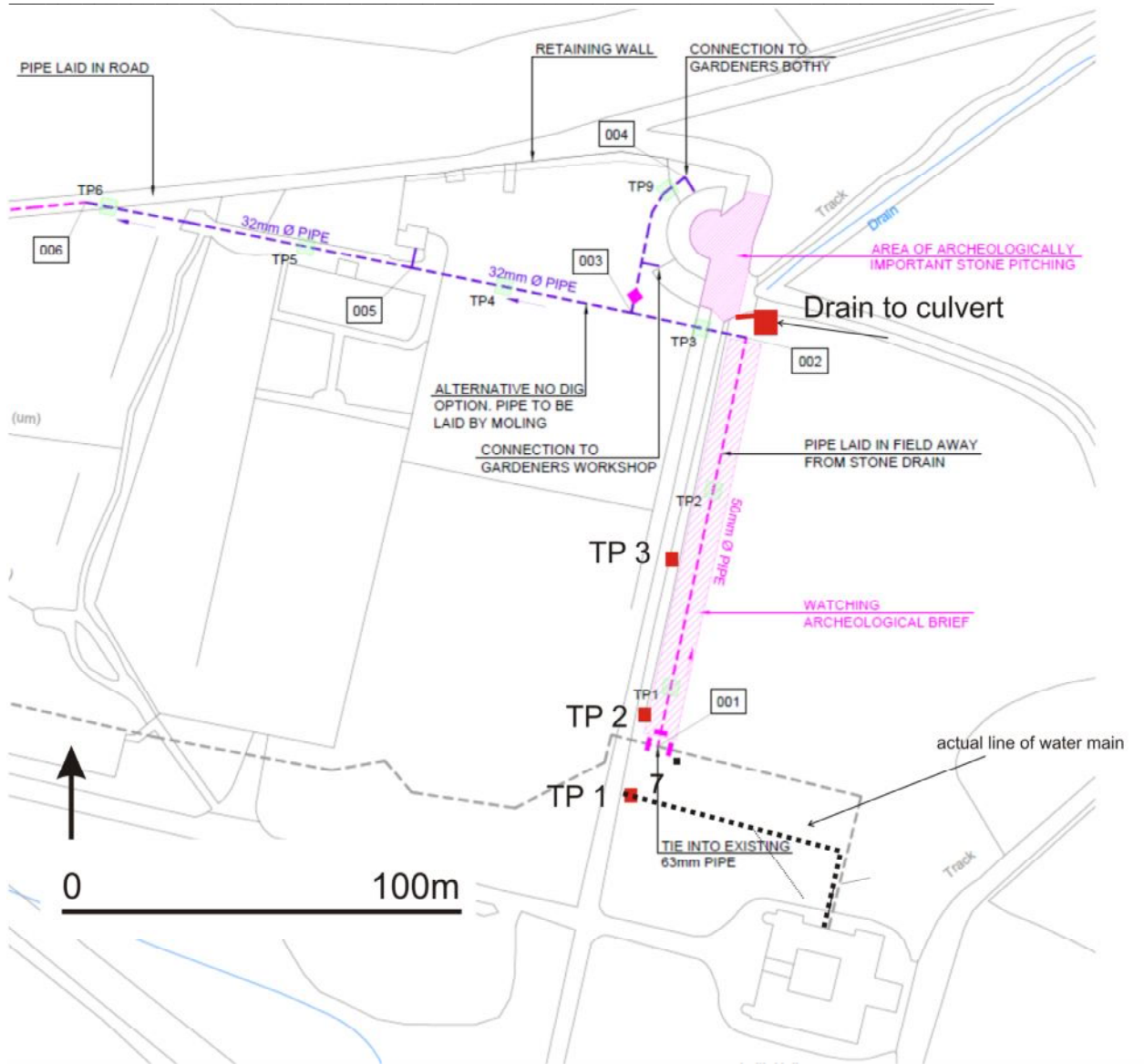
Illus 7 Position of TP3



Illus 8 Stone layer in fill of TP3



Illus 9 TP3 at 1.2m depth



Illus 10 Position of test pits and drain overlaid on Layout plan (Base plan courtesy of Allen Gordon). Note the actual line of water main.

5.2 New drain E of stables

A narrow trench was dug by mini-digger from the culvert directly SE of the stables, W to an area of lying water, in order to install a drain to flow the water into the culvert outflow.

W end (culvert outflow) 354061, 829954

Ran E c 5.6m to 354067, 829954 (Electricity line cover tape visible at base of N side of trench at this point), then angled slightly to E end 354067, 829953.

As the water was bubbling up over a wide area, a further square c 2m square, was opened centered on 354070, 829952.

The trench was between 500 and 600mm deep. The stratigraphy comprised disturbed and re-deposited backfill from both the culvert and the electricity cable; a few fragments of tile, slate etc and a single base of a 20th-century stoneware jar, were in the fill.



Illus 11 Position of drain (red arrows)



Illus 12 Culvert at W end of drain beside drive



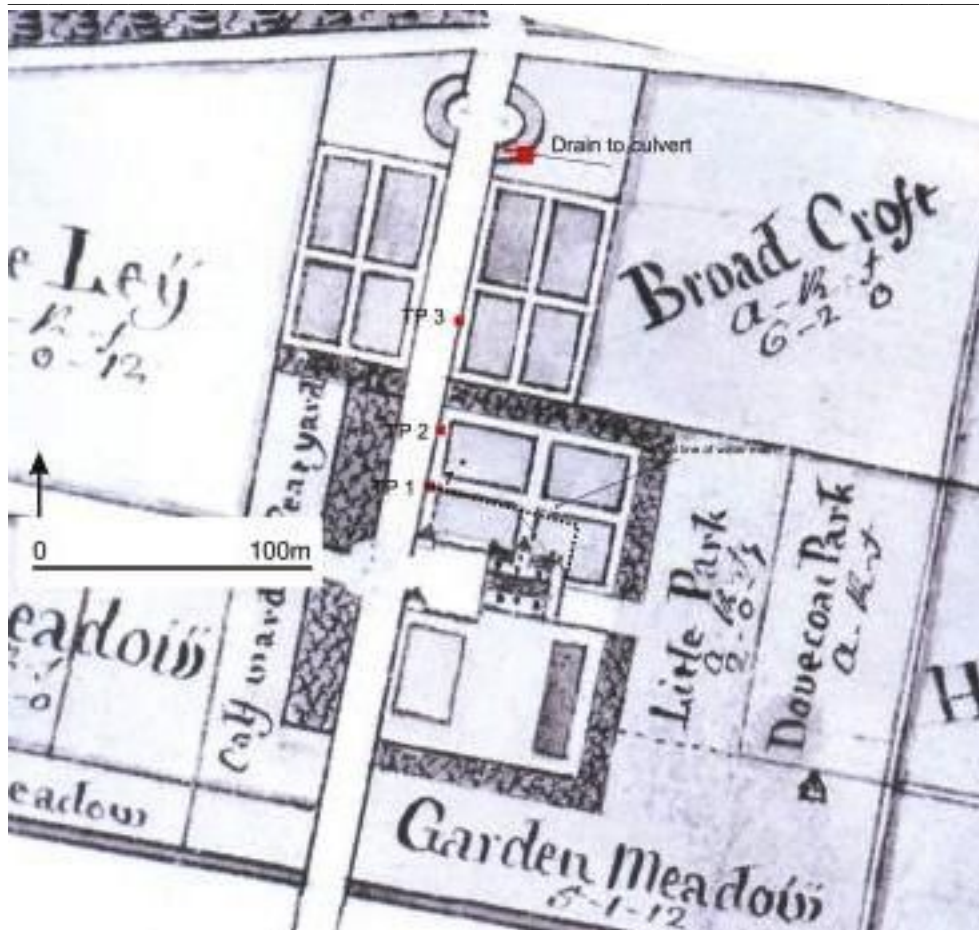
Illus 13 Drain looking E. Electric cable at base of trench beside ranging rod



Illus 14 Drain looking W

6 Discussion

There was no evidence that could be attributed to the formal gardens shown on the 1758 plan. It is possible that the stones in Test pit 3 *may* relate to a path or bank but there was no visible structure in the grouping and they could equally be fairly incidental levelling of a hollow- however this part of the water main trench should be observed.



Illus 15 Position of test pits and drain on underlay of 1758 plan (note this cannot be exact because of differences in survey methods)

References

- GSB 2006 Geophysical Survey Report. GSB Prospection Ltd. Report for NTS.
HLS, 2007 Historic Landscape Survey. 2 vols. Derek Carter Associates, Report for NTS
Murray, J C 2003 Leith Hall, Kennethmont, Aberdeenshire. Report for NTS.
Murray, H K 2007 Leith Hall, Kennethmont: Archaeological Excavation. Report for NTS
Murray H K & Murray, J C 2015 *Fire Main trench, Leith Hall, Aberdeenshire* MAS 2015-16. Report for NTS

Appendices

Appendix 1: Catalogue of digital photographic record (to archive)

Digital frame number	Content
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1-5	Test pit 1
6-8	Test pit 2
9-13	Test pit 3
14-33	Drain