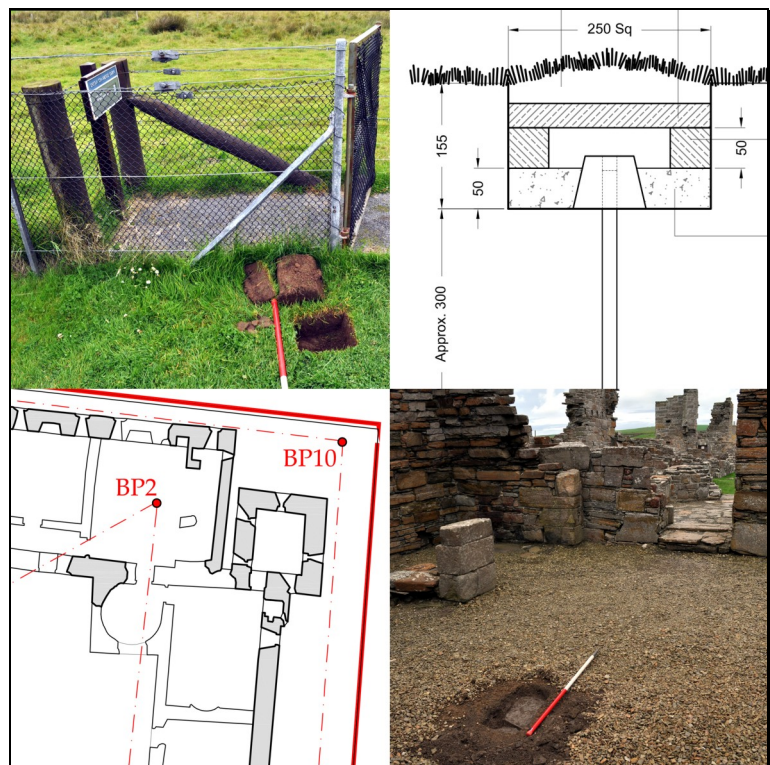


Historic Scotland
Properties in Care
Minor Archaeological Works 2011

**The Earl's Palace, Birsay,
The Brough of Birsay, Birsay,
and Unstan Cairn, Stenness, Orkney**
Archaeological monitoring,
August 2011

HS PIC Index numbers: 90033, 90034 & 90232
Project code: HSCO-90033-2011-01



19 March 2012
Kirkdale Archaeology

<u>Site</u>	Earl’s Palace, Birsay; Brough of Birsay, Birsay; Unstan Cairn, Stenness, Orkney
<u>N.G.R</u>	HY 2481 2776; HY 23982852; HY 2829 1172
<u>Project Description</u>	Archaeological monitoring
<u>Project code</u>	HSCO-90033-2011-01

Contents

Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Description	1
3.0 Interpretation and observations	3
A1.0 Appendix 1: List of photographs	4
Fig. 1: Location plan – Earl’s Palace, Birsay	6
Fig. 2: Location plan – Brough of Birsay	7
Fig. 3: Location plan – Unstan Cairn	8

SUMMARY: A watching brief was maintained at three monuments in Orkney during the excavation of small holes to allow the installation of permanent survey markers. Ten holes were dug at The Earl's Palace, Birsay (centred c HY 2481 2776), four at The Brough of Birsay, Birsay (centred c HY 23982852) and four at Unstan Cairn, Stenness (centred c HY 2829 1172). A few of the holes at Earl's Palace uncovered stone slab floor or courtyard surfaces just below protective layers of imported soil, sand or gravel, but the rest revealed only natural or previously disturbed deposits. Apart from the stone surfaces seen at Earl's Palace, there were no features or finds of archaeological significance seen during these works.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake an archaeological watching brief at three monuments in Orkney during the excavation of 18 small holes to allow the installation of permanent survey markers.

Ten holes were dug at The Earl's Palace, Birsay (centred c HY 2481 2776), four at The Brough of Birsay, Birsay (centred c HY 2398 2852) and four at Unstan Cairn, Stenness (centred c HY 2829 1172). A few of the holes at Earl's Palace uncovered stone slab floor or courtyard surfaces just below protective layers of imported soil, sand or gravel, but the rest revealed only natural or previously disturbed deposits. The holes reached a maximum depth of 200 mm and were mostly 250 x 250 mm in plan. Some holes at Earl's Palace were slightly larger in plan in order to locate an appropriate gap between stone slabs to allow the fixing of the survey markers.

The work was carried out on 23 June 2011.

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Earl's Palace, Birsay (Holes BP1-BP10 inc., centred c HY 2481 2776).

Ten holes were excavated in around the upstanding remains of the 16th-century Earl's Palace. The locations of the holes are shown in Fig. 1. Holes **BP1**, **BP2**, **BP4** and **BP9** all revealed stone surfaces or remnants thereof, all of which have been covered over in recent times in order to protect them from erosion.

BP1 was dug through layers of compacted whin dust and Terram, under which was a sandy layer with fragments of angular sandstone, likely to be remnants of the original floor surface of sandstone slabs, although it did not appear to be in good condition.

In **BP2**, layers of protective gravel were removed revealing a well-preserved floor surface of sandstone slabs. The hole was extended to 500 mm N-S to allow access to a gap between stones, in which the permanent survey marker could be fixed.

Stones seen in **BP4** are likely to represent a courtyard surface of sandstone slabs. As in **BP2**, the hole was extended to accommodate the installation of a survey marker.

The stones only partially visible in **BP9**, which lay near but outwith the Palace's north exterior wall, were of uncertain date and function, but their flat orientation gave them the appearance of a surface rather than construction debris or collapse.

The remaining six holes did not penetrate below recent landscaping and/or imported soil deposits.

2.2 Brough of Birsay (Holes BB1-BP4 inc., centred c HY 2398 2852).

Four holes were dug around the Brough of Birsay, within the monument's Guardianship area, but carefully located to stay within areas known to have been disturbed by previous archaeological excavations. The locations of the holes are shown in Fig. 2. The holes were all 250 x 250 mm in plan with a depth of 200 mm. Only turf and topsoil were disturbed and there were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

2.3 Unstan Cairn (Holes UN1- UN4 inc., centred c HY 2829 1172).

The four holes dug around the outside of Unstan Cairn were all 250 x 250 mm in plan with a depth of 200 mm and revealed nothing of archaeological significance. The locations of the holes are shown in Fig. 3. **UN1** contained a loose, stone and subsoil matrix layer beneath the topsoil which seemed most likely to be associated with the installation of the nearby path and gate.

3.0 INTERPRETATION AND OBSERVATIONS

Although none of these excavations disturbed any significant archaeological deposits or features, the presence of well-preserved sandstone slab surfaces was confirmed amongst the upstanding remains of Earl's Palace, Birsay.

Files have prefix "hsc0-90033-2011-01_" followed by number below

#	Description	From	Date
16	Hole BP1	E	10/8/2011
17	Hole BP1	E	10/8/2011
18	Hole BP1	S	10/8/2011
19	Hole BP2	S	10/8/2011
20	Hole BP2	W	10/8/2011
21	Hole BP2	NW	10/8/2011
22	Hole BP2	SE	10/8/2011
23	Hole BP3	S	10/8/2011
24	Hole BP3	W	10/8/2011
25	Hole BP4	SSW	10/8/2011
26	Hole BP4	S	10/8/2011
27	Hole BP4	W	10/8/2011
28	Hole BP5	SW	10/8/2011
29	Hole BP5	S	10/8/2011
30	Hole BP5	S	10/8/2011
31	Hole BP6	N	10/8/2011
32	Hole BP6	N	10/8/2011
33	Hole BP6	N	10/8/2011
34	Hole BP7	W	10/8/2011
35	Hole BP7	W	10/8/2011
36	Hole BP7	SW	10/8/2011
37	Hole BP8	S	10/8/2011
38	Hole BP8	W	10/8/2011
39	Hole BP9	W	10/8/2011
40	Hole BP9	N	10/8/2011
41	Hole BP10	E	10/8/2011
42	Hole BP10	NE	10/8/2011
43	Hole BS1	SW	10/8/2011
44	Hole BS1	SW	10/8/2011
45	Hole BS1	SE	10/8/2011
46	Hole BS2	E	10/8/2011
47	Hole BS2	E	10/8/2011
48	Hole BS2	N	10/8/2011
49	Hole BS3	NE	10/8/2011

#	Description	From	Date
50	Hole BS3	SE	10/8/2011
51	Hole BS3	NW	10/8/2011
52	Hole BS4	SE	10/8/2011
53	Hole BS4	SW	10/8/2011
54	Hole UN1	W	10/8/2011
55	Hole UN1	W	10/8/2011
56	Hole UN2	S	10/8/2011
57	Hole UN2	SE	10/8/2011
58	Hole UN3	E	10/8/2011
59	Hole UN3	NE	10/8/2011
60	Hole UN4	N	10/8/2011
61	Hole UN4	NW	10/8/2011

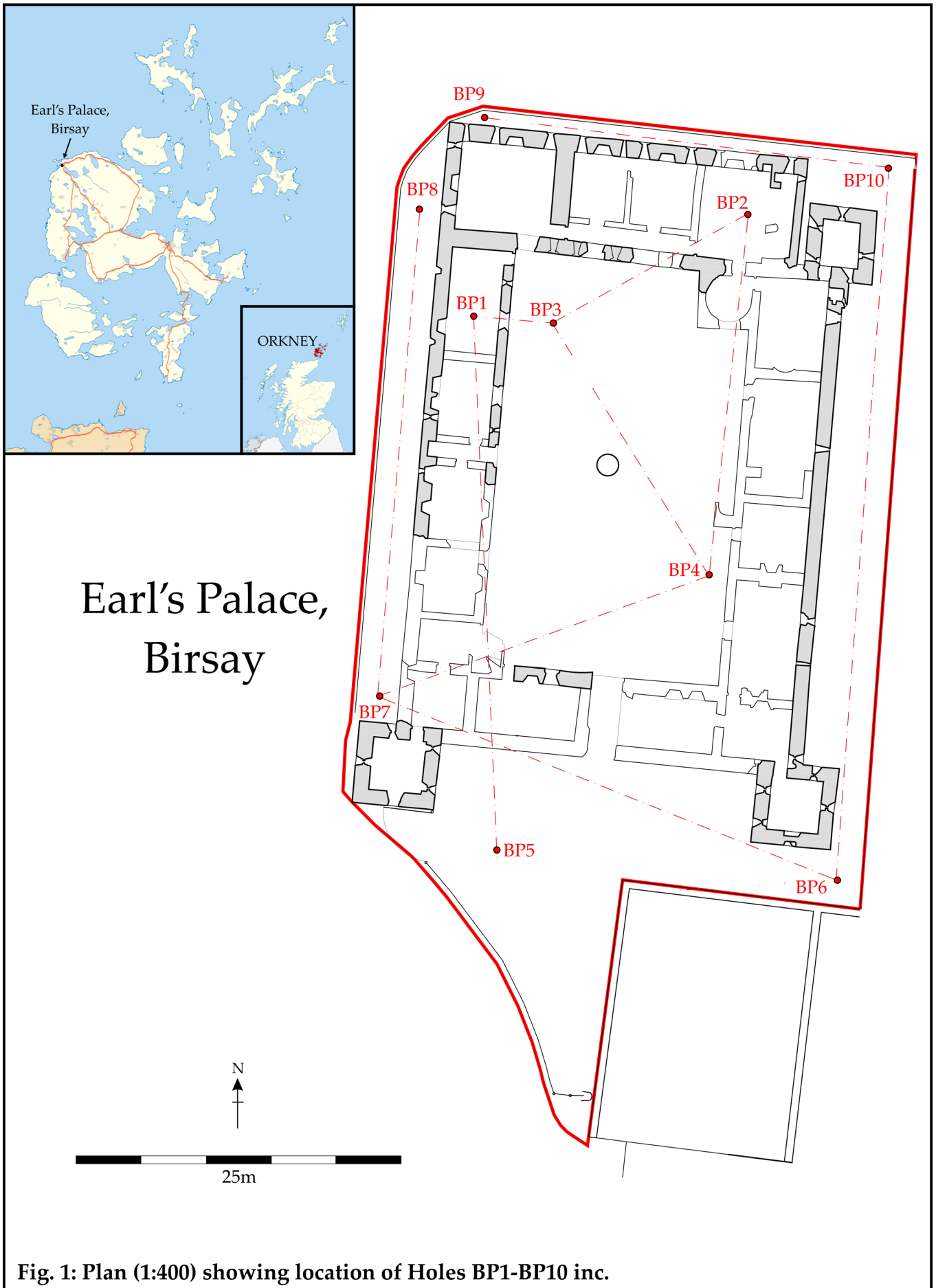
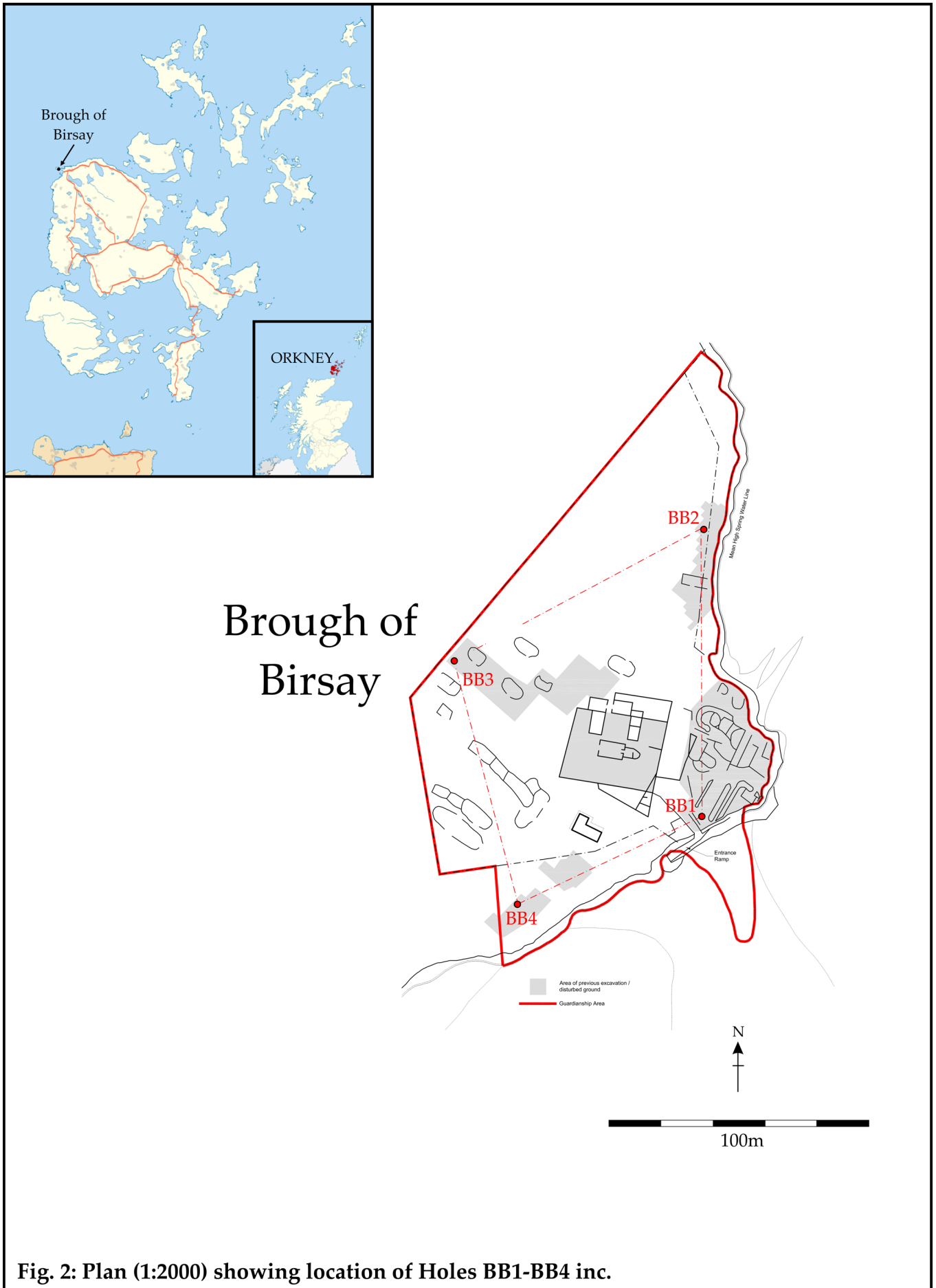


Fig. 1: Plan (1:400) showing location of Holes BP1-BP10 inc.





Unstan Chambered Cairn

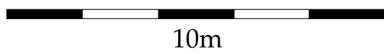
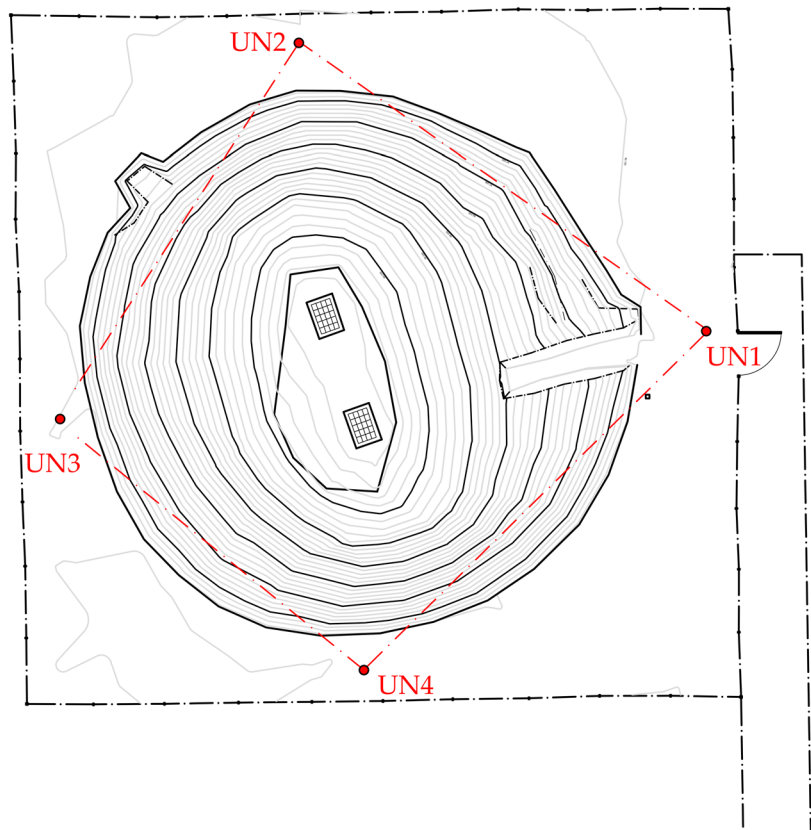


Fig. 3: Plan (1:200) showing location of Holes UN1-UN4 inc.