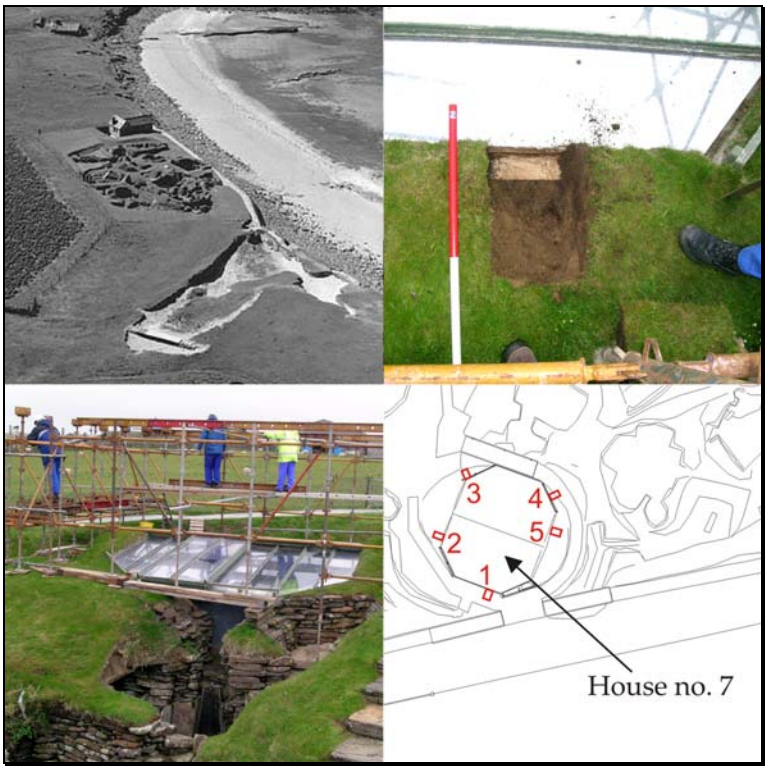
Historic Scotland
Properties in Care
Minor Archaeological Works 2007

Skara Brae Neolithic Village, Orkney:
Archaeological evaluation, May 2007

HS PIC Index number: 90276
Project code: HSCO-90276-2007-02



18 June 2007
Kirkdale Archaeology

Site	Skara Brae Neolithic Village, Orkney
N.G.R	HY 231 187
Project Description	Archaeological evaluation
Project code	HSCO-90276-2007-02

Contents

SUMMARY: May 2007 - Five small test pits were excavated around the glass roof covering House 7 at Skara Brae Neolithic Village. This was required to make sure that the removal of turf and topsoil during the removal of the glass roof from over House No. 7 would not disturb any sensitive archaeological features. Only the concrete base of the glass roof and sand were revealed. There were no finds or features of archaeological significance revealed during this work.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake a brief evaluation at Skara Brae Neolithic Village, Orkney during works being undertaken by HS MCU personnel. The metal and glass roof over House 7 was to be removed and the structure covered over.

The Neolithic settlement at Skara Brae was revealed in 1850 when a violent storm removed the turf and sand covering the site. Excavations followed, up to 1868, revealing some of the houses now seen, but no further investigation occurred until Professor Childe's excavations in the 1920s and 1930s. These later works uncovered more of the remarkably well preserved village, and included the building of a substantial wall along the seaward side of the site, later extended further east. Also around this time a metal and glass roof was constructed over House 7, one of the best preserved structures on the site.

Recent environmental monitoring has shown that the increased temperature and humidity brought about by the glass roof has accelerated the erosion of the sandstone, and a reflective covering was added to the upper surface of the glass. Severe weather caused damage to this covering rendering it ineffective and it was decided that the best long term solution was to replace the glass roof with a lightweight timber structure on which sedum grass would be planted.

The new 'roof' was to be installed using the base of the previous structure so that it would not be necessary to disturb any potentially sensitive areas. The only disturbance required was to be the removal of turf and topsoil to reveal the existing

modern roof structure.

These works were still ongoing at the time of this report and were expected to run from the middle of May to the end of June 2007. An archaeological evaluation of the area to be disturbed was undertaken on 29 May 2007.

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Overview

A framework of scaffolding had already been erected by the time of the site visit - this had involved no disturbance to the site.

The installation of the new roof structure required the removal of turf and topsoil in a 500 mm strip around the existing glass roof. A brief examination of the way in which the 1930 roof had been constructed showed that the roof appeared to sit on new sandstone walling built up on top of the original walls. This suggested that the ground in the area to be stripped of turf was at an artificial level created at the time the roof was inserted.

With this in mind it was decided that it would not be necessary to monitor the removal of the whole 500 mm wide strip, but that it would be sufficient to open five small test holes around the roof's edge to confirm the presence of the concrete roof base.

2.2 Trench 1

Situated at the south end of the roof - 500 mm SSW-NNE by 350 mm WNW-ESE, 200 mm deep. The removal of 100 mm of turf and topsoil (101) revealed clean sand (102), which was excavated to 200 mm depth (not bottomed) towards the south end, but at the north end, a strip of concrete (103) was encountered. This concrete extended up to 200 mm into the trench at a depth of 160 mm.

There were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

2.3 Trench 2

Situated at the west end of the roof - 500 mm WNW-ESE by 300 mm SSW-NNE, 200 mm deep. The removal of 100 mm of turf and topsoil (201) revealed clean sand (202)

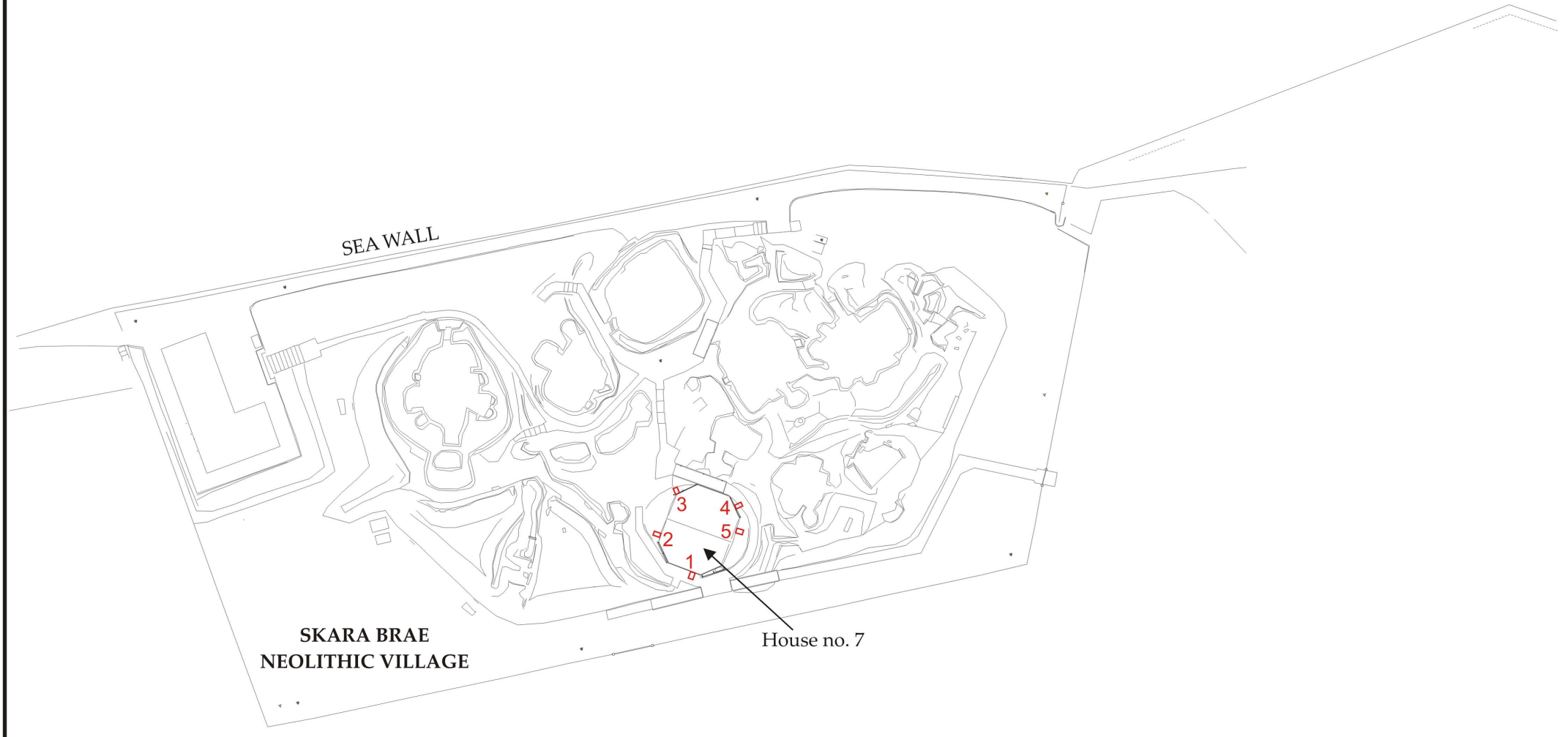


Fig. 1 : Plan (1:400) showing location of trenches 1-5

at the west end, which was excavated to 200 mm depth (not bottomed), but at the north end, a strip of concrete covered by metal flashing was encountered (203). This concrete extended up to 150 mm into the trench, sloping down to a maximum depth of 200 mm.

There were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

2.4 *Trench 3*

Situated at the NW end of the roof - 500 mm NW-SE by 400 mm SW-NE, up to 200 mm deep. The removal of 100 mm of turf and topsoil (301) revealed clean sand (302) at the south end, which was excavated to 200 mm depth (not bottomed). The north 400 mm of the trench bottomed on to the top of sandstone walling (303) – possibly the original structure but more likely partially modern rebuild.

There were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

2.5 *Trench 4*

Situated at the NE end of the roof - 500 mm SW-NE by 300 mm NW-SE, up to 150 mm deep. The removal of 100 mm of turf and topsoil (401) revealed clean sand (402) at the SE end, which was excavated to 150 mm depth (not bottomed). The NW end of the trench contained darker material – peaty, sandy soil (403) – possibly re-deposited material filling a cut (404) for the roof's construction, but more likely to be no more than variation in the redeposited sand and soil.

There were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

2.6 *Trench 5*

Situated near the NE corner of roof - 500 mm WNW-ESE by 300 mm SSW-NNE, up to 200 mm deep. The removal of 100 mm of turf and topsoil (501) revealed clean sand (502) at the SE end, which was excavated to 200 mm depth (not bottomed), but at the north end, a strip of concrete covered by metal flashing was encountered (503). This concrete extended up to 150 mm into the trench, sloping down to a maximum depth of 200 mm.

There were no finds or features of archaeological significance.

3.0 INTERPRETATION AND OBSERVATIONS

As expected, there were no finds or features of archaeological significance. Outwith the modern roof structure and the artificially raised roof level the deposits seen were probably all re-deposited sand.

Since there was clearly no threat to any sensitive areas, no further archaeological monitoring or evaluation was deemed necessary.

A1.0 APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CONTEXTS

Trench 1

#	**Description**
101	Turf and topsoil
102	Sand
103	Concrete – base of 1930 roof

Trench 2

#	**Description**
201	Turf and topsoil
202	Sand
203	Concrete – base of 1930 roof

Trench 3

#	**Description**
301	Turf and topsoil
302	Sand
303	Sandstone walling

Trench 4

#	**Description**
401	Turf and topsoil
402	Sand
403	Peaty, sandy soil
404	Possible cut for modern roof

Trench 5

#	**Description**
501	Turf and topsoil
502	Sand
503	Concrete – base of 1930 roof

A2.0 APPENDIX 2: LIST OF DRAWINGS

#	Type	Description	Scale
1	Plan	HS plan, amended	1:400

A3.0 APPENDIX 3: LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

HSCO-90276-2007-02-CD1 – all taken 29/5/2007

#	Description	From
1-4	General views of interior faces of walls of House 7 showing modern rebuild over original wall	
5-10	General views of scaffold and modern roof	
11	Trench 1	SW
12	Trench 1	S
13,14	Trench 2	SW
15	Trench 3	NW
16	Trench 4	E
17	Trench 4	SE
18,19	Trench 5	E

A5.0 APPENDIX 5: ARCHIVAL REFERENCES

Site	Skara Brae Neolithic Village
HS PIC Index no	90276
Kirkdale Project no	HSCO-90276-2007-02
Date of site work	29 May 2007

Files submitted on CD:

Report in MS Word	HSCO-90276-2007-02-Report.doc
TIFFs	HSCO-90276-2007-02-Report Fig 1.tif
PDF	HSCO-90276-2007-02-Report.pdf
Photo scans	HSCO-90276-2007-02-CD1- 1-19.jpg(s)