

Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

Updated on 15/06/2007

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Orkney Islands
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Ring Of Brodgar
PROJECT CODE:	HSCO-90042-2014-01
PARISH:	Stenness
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Andrew Hollinrake
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Kirkdale Archaeology
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching brief
NMRS NO(S):	HY21SE 1
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Henge, Stone circle
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	Centred c. HY 2943 1342
START DATE (this season)	20 October 2014
END DATE (this season)	29 October 2014
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	A watching brief was maintained during the removal of turf as part of remedial works to improve drainage. It was possible to carry out the work without excavating beyond the recently-added clayey soil, turf, stone chips and terram, or the apparently undisturbed peat towards the west end of the excavated area. As such, no deposits of archaeological sensitivity or significance were exposed or disturbed.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Environment Scotland
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ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Archive to be deposited with Historic Environment Scotland

**HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2014/2015**

Ring of Brodgar • Monitoring • October 2014

HS PIC Index Number: 90042

SITE: Ring of Brodgar, Mainland, Orkney Islands.

N.G.R.: HY 2942 1340

DESCRIPTION: Watching brief during the installation of drainage pipes and new turf.

PROJECT CODE: HSCO-90042-2014-01

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DECEMBER 2014

INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake a watching brief during the installation of new drainage pipes and turf along a portion of the access path which runs around the interior side of the standing stones at the Ring of Brodgar (Figure 1).

Several attempts had been made in previous years to mitigate serious drainage problems in an area which suffers heavy foot traffic. In 2012, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Kirkdale Archaeology which comprised the excavation of a series of narrow trenches across the path to determine the depth of added soil and turf¹.

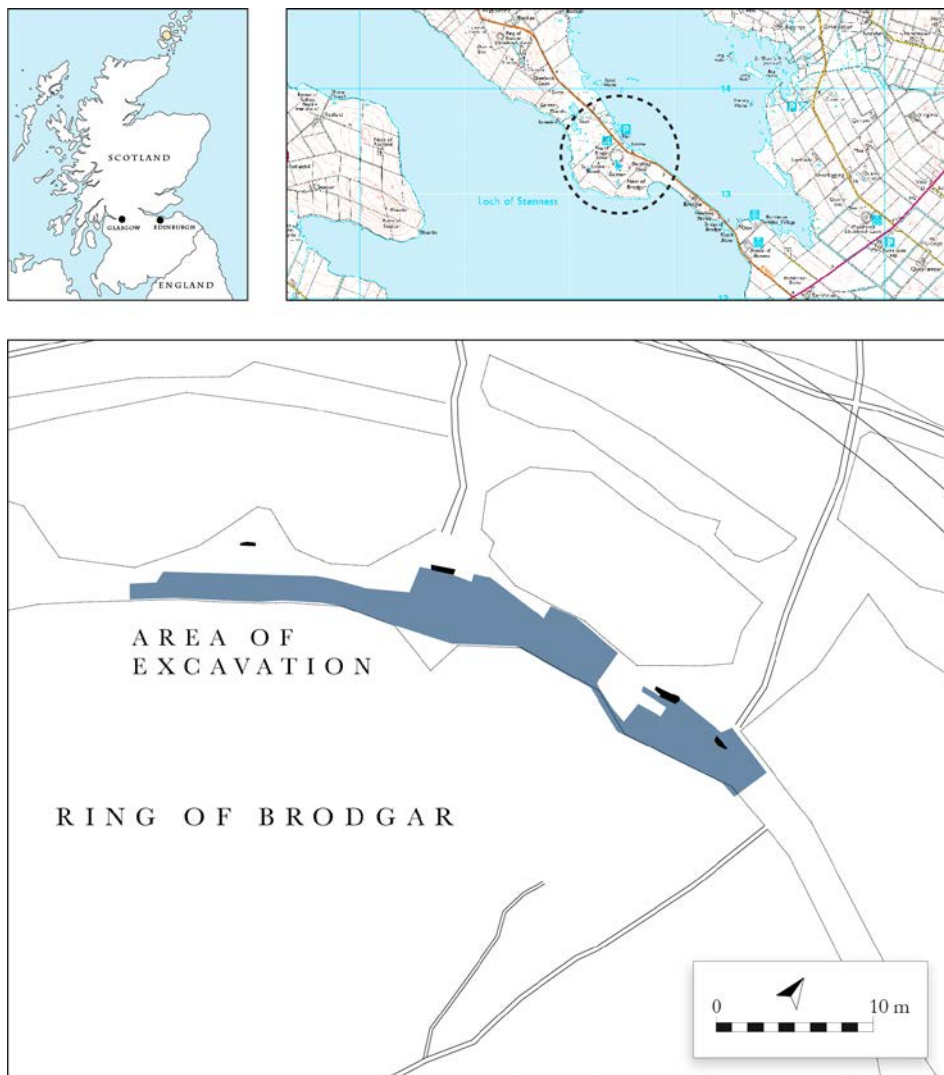


Figure 1: Location plan of the affected area.

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¹ Kirkdale Archaeology report: HSCO-90042-2012-01.

Guided by the 2012 evaluation, the intention of the 2014 work was to remove only the most recently-added turf and soil layers or, where required, to remove natural peat deposits without disturbing any sensitive archaeological deposits; then to lay a series of pipes across the track with terram, sand and new turf over the pipes, in the hope that this would carry excess water from the interior of the stone circle out into the surrounding ditch. A small portion of the path at the north end of the circle was chosen due to it being the worst affected area in terms of water accumulation. After the effectiveness of this method has been assessed, further work is expected to be undertaken in the future.

The work was carried out during October and November 2014, with archaeological monitoring from 20th – 29th October, 2014.

DESCRIPTION

The area of work included most of the grass path running c.20m to the west of, and c.25m to the east of, the south end of the causeway across the ditch at the far north edge of the Ring of Brodgar stone circle.

Rather than excavate all recently-added surface material, it was decided that the best approach was to excavate no more than a depth of material sufficient to allow the installation of pipes, sand and new turf, without resulting in a significantly elevated surface in relation to the existing level. Avoiding deeper excavation was thought necessary to avoid creating a ‘reservoir’ within the path surface: if the new level of the path was created such that the installed pipes were too low in relation to the outer edge, then it would likely trap water in the path area and the drainage problems would persist.

In practice, this required removing only a shallow skim of turf and light- to mid-grey, clayey topsoil **001**, c.30mm - c.70mm thick, over most of the area. However, where some smaller areas of higher ground prevailed to the west (of where the causeway meets the path), a small amount of what appeared to be previously undisturbed dark, peaty turf and topsoil **002** was removed. Beneath **001** there were varied deposits, much as seen during the 2012 evaluation. In some areas the removal of turf revealed loose stone chips over terram, which were left *in-situ* since these areas appeared to be doing a good job of drainage already.

The majority of the exposed deposits revealed were clearly recently added clayey soils, amongst which modern debris such as sherds of white china and plastic fragments could be seen. In some small, isolated areas the peat or peaty soil deposits revealed, **003**, appeared to be of natural origin. The same peaty deposits were seen to underlay peaty topsoil **002**, and consisted of heavily-rooted, dark, humic peat.

Where the existing surface level lay below the depth required, the ground was left undisturbed and the pipes were installed above the turf, after laying terram and a shallow layer of sand.

The majority of the excavation was restricted to the removal of turf and topsoil from the path, but in a few places slots were cut extending just into the heather along the path's exterior edge. These slots were cut to allow the installed pipes to enter the top of the ditch. This entailed the removal of heather and heavily-rooted, peaty topsoil in the form of clean, regularly-shaped turfs which could be replaced over the pipe ends, concealing them from view. Care was taken to avoid damaging the heather roots.

There were no finds or features of any great archaeological significance, and the location, extent and depth of deposits were much as seen during the 2012 evaluation.



Plate 1: Post-excitation photograph of the east end of the excavated area, looking west.

CONCLUSIONS

It was possible to carry out the work without excavating beyond either the recently added clayey soil, turf, stone chips and terram, or the apparently undisturbed peat towards the west end of the excavated area. As such, no deposits of archaeological sensitivity or significance were exposed or disturbed. It is recommended that this approach is maintained during future works intended to mitigate drainage along the course of the path.

LIST OF CONTEXTS

Number	Description
001	Turf and light to mid grey, clayey topsoil 30mm to 70mm thick.
002	Peaty turf and topsoil.
003	Peat and peaty soil under 001 and 002.

LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
1	General view of the east end of area after excavation.	E	29/10/2014
2	General view of the east end of area after excavation.	W	29/10/2014
3	Narrow slots cut into the heather, east end of excavation.	NW	29/10/2014
4	General view of the middle of the area after excavation.	SE	29/10/2014
5	General view of the middle of the area after excavation.	NW	29/10/2014
6	General view of the middle of the area after excavation.	NW	29/10/2014
7	General view of the west end of the area after excavation.	E	29/10/2014
8	General view of the west end of the area after excavation.	W	29/10/2014
9	General view showing the scaffolding bridge over the ditch.	SE	29/10/2014
10	Work in progress - installing terram/sand/pipes.	NW	29/10/2014
11	Work in progress - installing terram/sand/pipes.	NW	29/10/2014
12	Work in progress - installing terram/sand/pipes.	N	29/10/2014
13	Work in progress - installing terram/sand/pipes.	S	29/10/2014

LIST OF DRAWINGS

Number	Type	Description	Scale
001	Plan	Extent of excavated area.	1:200