

*Discovery and Excavation in Scotland – OASIS-type Form (2006)*

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Orkney Islands
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Unstan Chambered Cairn
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	HSCO-90232-2013-01
<b>PARISH:</b>	Stenness
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Andrew Hollinrake
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Kirkdale Archaeology
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Watching brief
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	HY21SE 5
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	Chambered cairn
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	None
<b>NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)</b>	HY 2829 1172
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	28 January 2013
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	29 January 2013
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)</b>	
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	A watching brief was maintained at Unstan Cairn, Stenness, Orkney (HY 2829 1172) during the excavation of a narrow trench cut into the west-facing slope of the mound. This work was to determine the depth and nature of deposits overlying the concrete cap sealing the monument's original masonry and to investigate the possibility of inserting some form of drainage. The excavation revealed that a substantial overburden of material had been put in place over the concrete, which made the insertion of any new drainage impractical. A small part of what was assumed to be part of the original masonry of the monument was also revealed, and left undisturbed.
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	Historic Scotland
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<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)</b>	Archive to be deposited in NMRS

**HISTORIC SCOTLAND PROPERTIES IN CARE  
MINOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS 2013**

**Unstan Chambered Cairn • Excavation • January 2013**

**HS PIC Index Number: 90232**

**SITE:** Unstan Chambered Cairn, Mainland, Orkney Islands

**N.G.R.:** HY 282 117

**DESCRIPTION:** Investigative excavation on the roof of the cairn in order to determine the depth and nature of the deposits overlying the modern concrete cap

**PROJECT CODE:** HSCO-90232-2013-01

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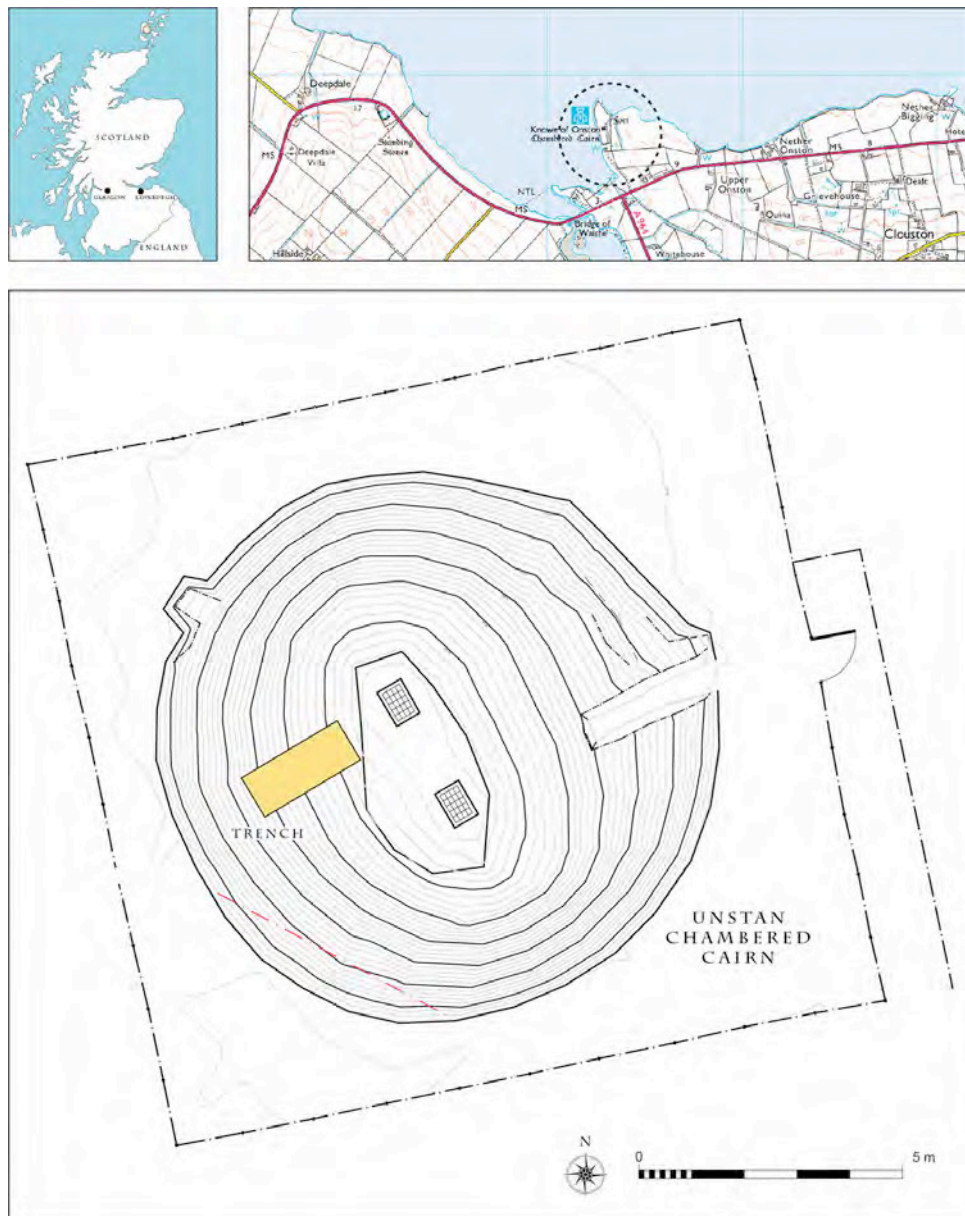
4 Western Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 5QF

**JANUARY 2013**

## INTRODUCTION

Under the terms of its PIC call-off contract with Historic Scotland, Kirkdale Archaeology was asked to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Unstan Chambered Cairn, Mainland, Orkney (Fig.1). This work was to determine the depth and nature of deposits overlying the concrete cap sealing the monument's original masonry, in order to determine the feasibility of installing improved drainage to help prevent the build up of moisture within the cairn.

The work was carried out on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013.



**Figure 1:** Plan showing the location of Unstan Chambered Cairn and the area of works.  
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## **DESCRIPTION**

The trench was excavated by hand into the W-facing side of the grassy mound covering the monument. The trench measured approximately 1m N/S by 2.4m E/W. The maximum depth below ground level was 1.10m.

Initially, only a narrow trench, approximately 0.3m wide, was excavated. The turf and topsoil, **001**, was a firm, greyish mid-to-dark brown, slightly silty, clayey soil with occasional small stone fragments. This sealed a deep deposit of loose, greyish brown, stony clay, **002**, which contained frequent angular and sub-angular fragments of sandstone up to 150mm x 150mm x 250mm in size, and occasional fragments of mortar. In the N-facing section, a horizontal pipe, 125mm in diameter (**005**) ran from an internal vent out to the ground surface.



**Plate 1:** The masonry 004 at the bottom of the trench.  
The pipe (005) is visible to the right.

Context **002** sealed both the upper surface of the concrete **003**, as well as a small area of masonry, **004**. Due to the narrow nature of the trench, it was not possible to examine closely the masonry revealed (**004**), but it could be seen that the bottom edge of the concrete clearly defined an interface between the 20<sup>th</sup> Century concrete cap and the earlier masonry on which it had been set.

The upper part of the trench was subsequently widened to 1m, and dug to a depth of 0.25m (maximum), creating a 'step'. This extension removed only topsoil **001** and a small amount of context **002**. This

extension was required for safety reasons, given the depth and width of the original trench.

## CONCLUSIONS

The trench revealed that a substantial overburden of material had been put in place over the concrete, which made the insertion of any new drainage impractical. A small part of what was assumed to be part of the original masonry of the monument was also revealed, and left undisturbed.

Only the upper surface of masonry **004** was partially visible, but it seemed very likely that this was part of the original structure of the chambered tomb. Whether it was still *in situ* is uncertain; it may have been partially rebuilt to provide a more stable wall head onto which the concrete of the modern protective cap could have been poured. Similarly, loose masonry may have been cleared down to a uniform level.

In any case, it was not possible to access the masonry closely enough for any detailed recording, so it was only recorded photographically, and a sketch section/profile drawn to show its position, and the profile of the concrete cap (Plate 1 and Fig.2, respectively).

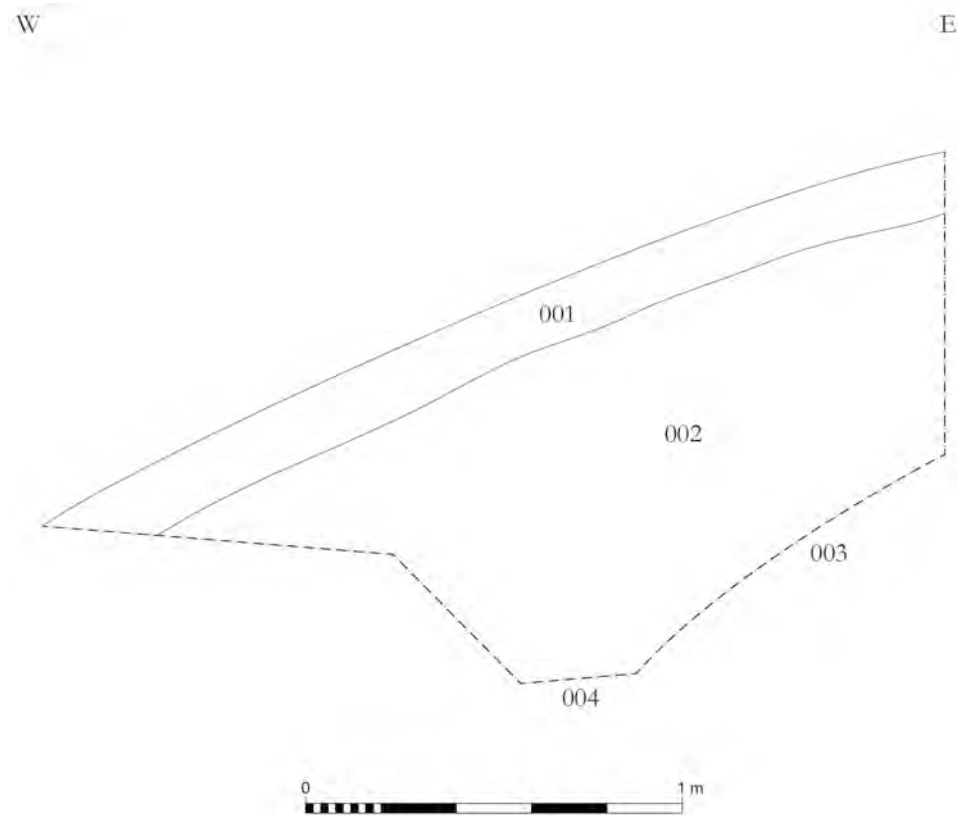


Figure 2: S-facing section of the trench

## LIST OF CONTEXTS

Number	Description
001	Firm, greyish, mid to dark brown, slightly silty, clayey soil with occasional small stone fragments
002	Loose, greyish brown, stony clay, with frequent angular and sub-angular fragments of sandstone up to 150mm x 150mm x 250mm in size, occasional fragments of mortar
003	Concrete cap covering original masonry of monument
004	Masonry, not recorded in detail. Some sub-angular sandstone slabs partially visible, c.1.10m below ground level
005	A horizontal pipe, 125mm in diameter, running from an internal vent out to the ground surface

## LIST OF DRAWINGS

No.	Type	Description	Scale
1	Plan	Location of trench	1:50
2	Section	S-facing	1:10

## LIST OF DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS

No.	Description	From	Date
1	Excavation in progress – first stage completed	W	28/1/2013
2	Excavation in progress – first stage completed	W	28/1/2013
3	Showing location of trench	SE	28/1/2013
4	Excavation in progress – first stage completed	E	28/1/2013
5	Excavation in progress – first stage completed	E	28/1/2013
6	Masonry 004, detailed view	W	29/1/2013
7	View of bottom of trench after excavation	W	29/1/2013
8	General view of excavated area	W	29/1/2013
9	General view of excavated area	W	29/1/2013
10	General view of excavated area	W	29/1/2013
11	North-facing section	NW	29/1/2013