

Archaeological watching brief, Old Place of Monreith, Dumfries and Galloway

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, OLD PLACE OF MONREITH, GLASSERTON,
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY**

DGC planning application: 16/P/1/0148

NGR: NX 38119 43013

Canmore ID: 62761

DGC HER: MDG17636

Listed Building ID: LB10123

Date of intervention: 3-4 July 2017

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning application 16/P/1/0148 was for internal alterations and replacement of three dormer windows, alterations to existing guttering and installation of new drop pipes at the Old Place of Monreith.

A condition was placed on the planning application. It required that no development could take place until the developer has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority (in consultation with the Council Archaeologist). This programme of works would take the form of a watching brief during any ground-breaking works, and a photographic record of the internal alterations.

1.2 The developer, The Landmark Trust, commissioned John Pickin Archaeology and Heritage to prepare the Written Scheme of Investigation and undertake the watching brief.

1.3 Subsequent to the application the developer decided not to proceed with the internal alterations. The report below deals only with the findings of the watching brief.

2 BACKGROUND

The Old Place of Monreith, also known as Dowies, is located in the Wigtownshire Machars some 4km east of the village of Port William (Fig. 1). The building lies on the south side of the Monreith Burn and is separated from the burn by an area of rough grassland and marsh. The surrounding landscape is typically grass pasture within large post-medieval field enclosures.

The building is a three-storey L-shaped tower house with a wheel-stair in the re-entrant angle. It dates from the early 17th century and was the principal residence of the Maxwells of Monreith. The Old Place became derelict during the 18th century and was converted to a



Fig. 1. Location of The Old Place of Monreith.

farmhouse in the 19th century. In 1983 the house was restored by the present owners, The Landmark Trust.

In its current form the Old Place is a free-standing structure within a lawned enclosure with a 19-20th century cart shed to the north-east. Historic maps show that the house was once at the centre of a larger building complex (Fig. 2). The First Edition six-inch OS map, surveyed in 1848, depicts the house at the south-western end of a long building range; there is a single building to the north-west and a walled orchard to the south-east. The First Edition twenty five-inch map survey of 1894 shows the same layout and also marks an L-shaped building to the north and the 1906 edition marks an extension on the south side of the L-shaped building. By the time The Landmark Trust acquired the house in 1983 the majority of the surrounding buildings had been removed but a contemporary pre-restoration photograph shows an attached building against the west side of the house's north face (Fig. 3).

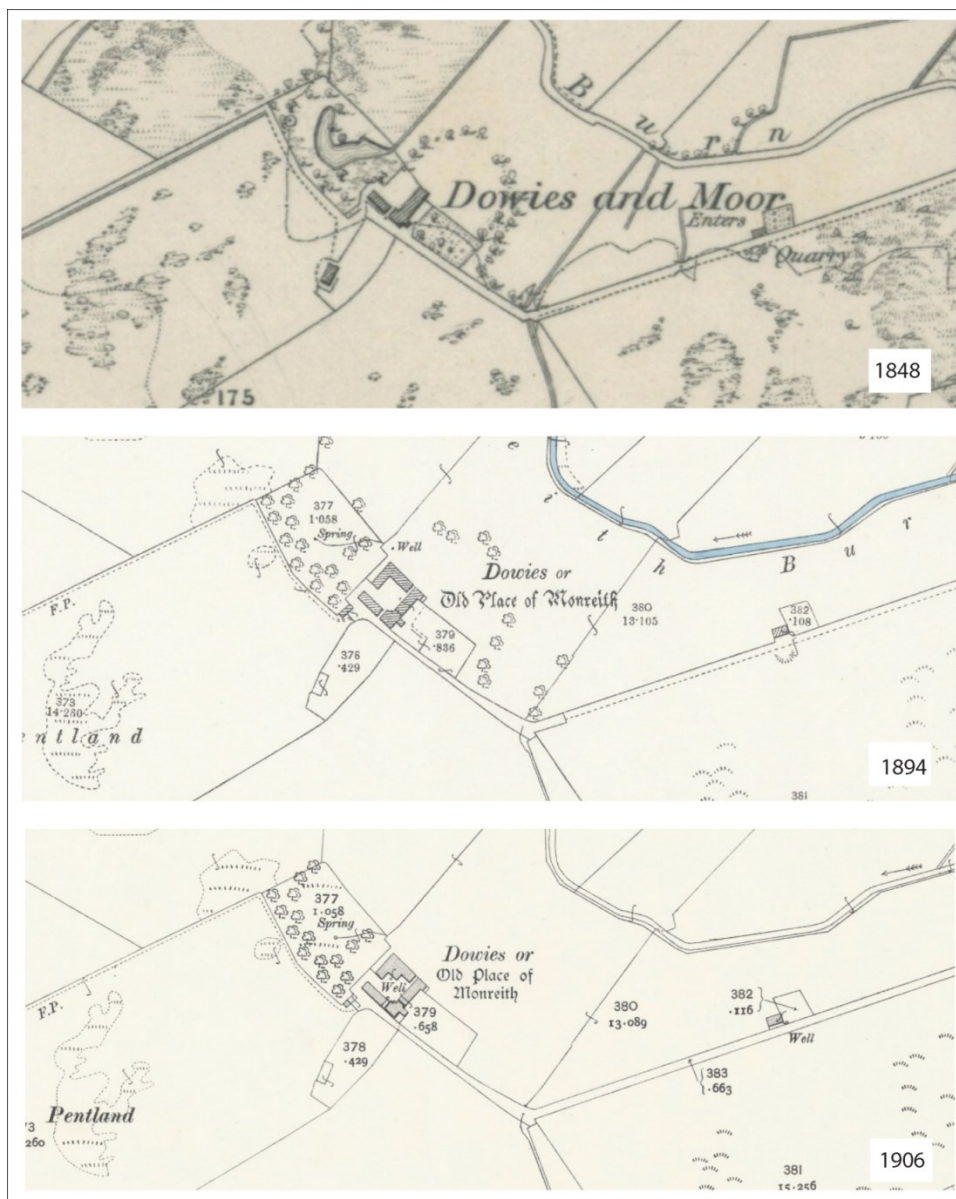


Fig. 2. Ordnance Survey map extracts showing Old Place of Monreith. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland



Fig. 3. Pre-restoration view showing a now-demolished two-storey structure against the west corner of north face. Image: The Landmark Trust - <https://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/search-and-book/properties/old-place-of-monreith-10102>

3 PROJECT WORKS

3.1 The watching brief was carried out over two days, 3-4 July 2017. Small hand-dug pits were excavated close to the north and south-west walls to locate the existing ground drains and then two machine trenches were excavated for drains connecting the new down pipes with the existing services (Fig. 4).

3.2 Both trenches were monitored during excavation and all potential archaeological features were recorded.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 6-9)

4.1.1 Trench 1, 3.4m long x 0.8m wide, ran parallel to and 0.4m in front of the north side of the house's north-west facing wall; the trench's south-west end was directly outside the ground floor doorway into the stair turret and at this point was 1.3m wide. Before machine excavation began three sandstone paving slabs leading to the doorway were lifted; these slabs, set in a concrete base and inserted into the top soil layer (1), are probably a modern feature and part of the 1980s restoration work. Between the trench and wall were a number of large greywacke boulders, presumably part of the building's original foundation course. The trench was approximately 0.45m deep but reached a depth of 0.60m at the north-east end where a modern drain cut (see feature (11) below) was exposed.

4.1.2 The central section of the trench had a dark, loamy top soil layer (1 and 8) up to 0.25 deep. To the north-east it was cut by an angle-sided trench (11) which had been dug to take a salt-glazed drain pipe (7) connected to the existing down pipe on the wall. This trench



Fig.4. External ground plan of Old Place of Monreith showing the location of Trenches 1 and 2.

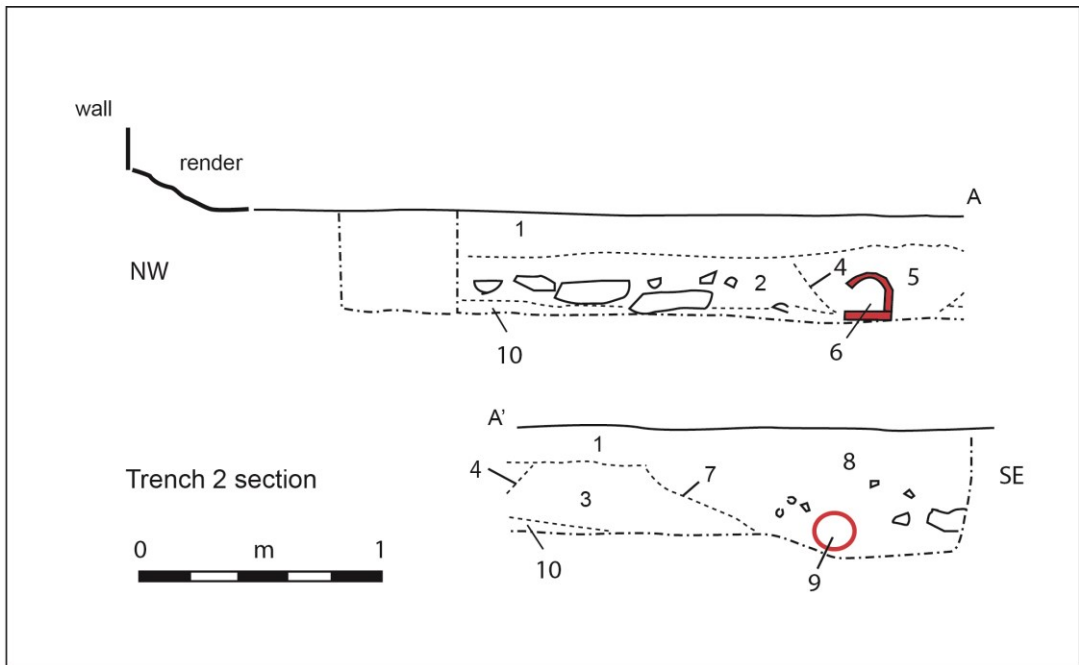
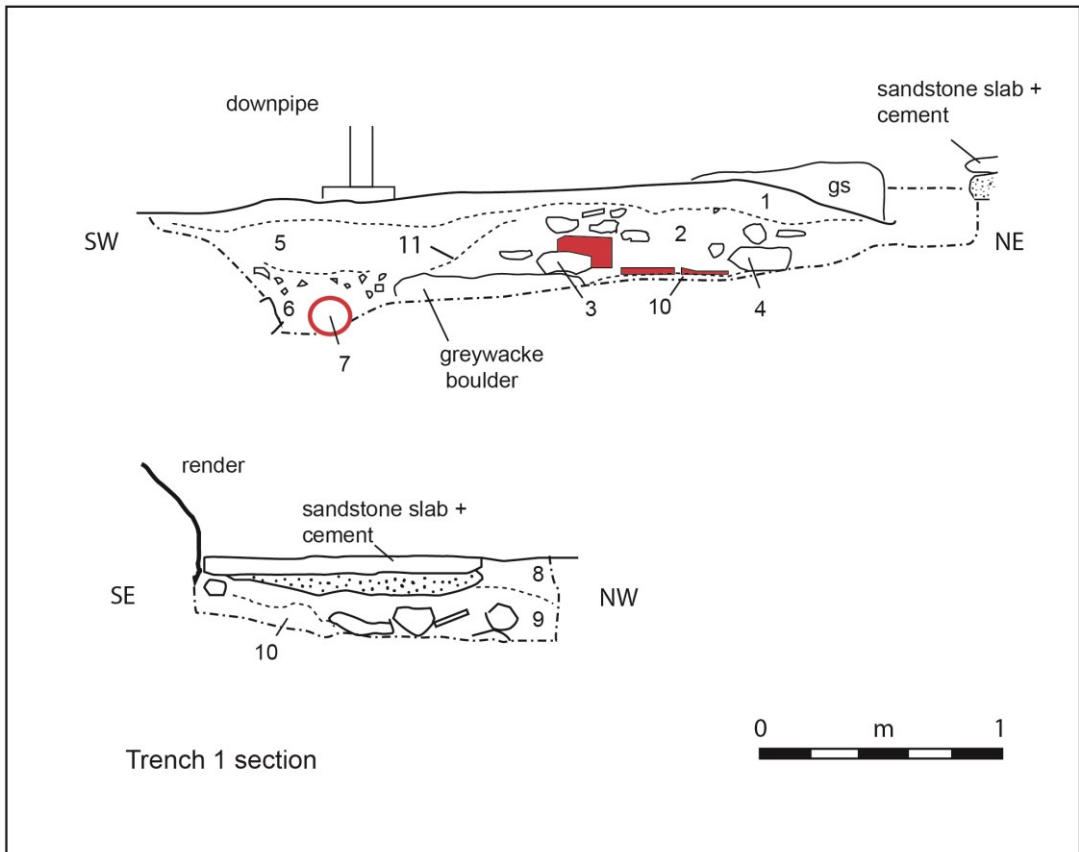


Fig. 5. Sections of Trenches 1 and 2.

was filled with a layer of soil and broken cement (5) above a deposit of black soil and small stones (6). The trench, pipe and backfill deposits must belong to the 1980's restoration.

4.1.3 To the south-west a thin top soil sealed a layer of dark soil with small stones (9) that contained the remains of a ceramic horseshoe drain with base tiles (12) which had probably been disturbed and damaged when the paving slabs (see 4.1.1 above) were laid; this layer and the top soil above contained some sherds of 19th century white-glazed ceramic plates. Layer (9), observed in the south-west end of the trench appeared to be the same deposit as layer (2) in the section's long face but disturbance from the paving slabs meant a direct relationship between the two could not be confirmed. Layer (2), dark soil with stones, contained a horse shoe drain with tile base (3) surrounded by the remains of stone side packing and a stone cover (4); the drain ran parallel to the wall and probably connected at an angle with drain (12). Layer (2) sealed a deposit of compact orange clay (10); only a small part of this deposit was exposed in the trench but it may a natural glacial clay. Layer (2) also appeared to rest against the top of a large greywacke boulder but it could not be ascertained if this was a natural feature or part of a boulder foundation course for the building.

4.2 Trench 2 (Figs. 7-12)

4.2.1 Trench 2, 4.6m long, was excavated against the lawn side of a set of modern paving slabs running parallel with the wall and south-east of the kitchen door. Two of the slabs were lifted to provide a 90 degree connection between the new down pipe and the main pipe trench. The trench had a maximum depth of 0.50m at the south-eastern end.

4.2.2 At the north-east end of the trench a 0.20m deep black topsoil (1) overlay a deposit of orange clay and gravel with stones (2); some of these stones were comparatively large (0.30m x 0.10m) slabs of greywacke.

4.2.3 To the south-east deposit (2) was cut by a large trench (4), 0.60m wide at the top and tapering to 0.40m, which contained a clay horseshoe drain set on a clay tile base (6); the fill of the trench was a dark soil (5) similar in colour and composition to the topsoil above. The south-east side of trench (4) cut through a deposit of black soil with lenses of orange clay (3) which was cut further to the south-east by another pipe trench (7). This trench, filled with a black-grey soil with small angular stone fragments (8), contained a modern drain pipe (9); it probably dates from the restoration work of the 1980s.

4.2.4 Layers (2) and (3) sealed a compact deposit of orange clay and gravel. Only a small part (less than 0.05m deep) part of this deposit was exposed in the trench but it might represent the top of the natural glacial clay and gravel.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 The principal features exposed in Trench 1 were the two sets of horseshoe drains. The only complete horseshoe drain was 105mm wide x 105mm wide X 320mm long and the associated tiles or platelets were approximately 110mm 320mm; both the drains and tiles were hand-made. Tiles of this type were manufactured as land drains and became

increasingly popular after about 1820. Most drains were produced locally and the 1850 First Edition six-inch map marks a tile works just north of Monreith village (NGR: NX 357 415). Probably the tile works for the Monreith Estate, the site is shown as still operational on the 1906 six-inch OS map and it is likely that the drains in Trench 1 came from here. The drains were set at a comparatively shallow depth and presumably were used during the mid-19th century and later as simple rain water and run-off drains. Although not confirmed by excavation, it is likely that these drains were comparatively short in length and led to soakaways. The other features in the trench – pipe trench (11) and the slabbed pathway – date from the restoration in the 1980s.

5.2 The horseshoe field drain (5) in Trench 2 has the same form to those in Trench 1 and must be of a similar date. Layers (2) and (3) were both cut by pipe trench (4) and must pre-date the trench. No datable material was recovered from these layers but the orange clay and large stones in (2) suggest that it comprises redeposited natural deposits and so may possibly be part of the building's original construction or foundation trench. The dark soil composition of layer (3) suggests a more disturbed deposit but its stratigraphic and chronological relationships with layer (2) are unknown.

5.3 In summary, the only archaeological features recorded in the two trenches were a series of 19th century clay field drains; these drains were probably used with down pipes for rain water drainage. In Trench 2 the drain cut through earlier deposits, one of which may have been part of a foundation trench for the building. Both trenches showed that the natural glacial clay and gravel is comparatively shallow, occurring about 0.50m below the surface.



Fig. 6. Trench 1, pre-excavation view.



Fig. 7. Trench 1, drain (12).



Fig. 8. Trench 1, drain (3).



Fig. 9. Trench 1, general view.



Fig. 10. Trench 2, pre-excitation view.



Fig. 11. Trench 2. Drain (6) centre with layer (2) to left and layer (3) to right.



Fig.12. Trench 2. General post-excavation view with pipe (9) in foreground.

6 APPENDIX 1 - Record Summaries

Trench 1

01/08	Top soil
02	Dark soil with small stones. Contains (3) and (4) and cut by (11).
03	Horse shoe drain. Associated with (4) and within (2).
04	Stone surrounds and capping to horse shoe drain. Sealed by/part of (2)
05	Black soil and cement fragments. Seals (6) and comprises upper fill of (11).
06	Black soil and small stones. Sealed by (5) and comprises lower fill of (11).
07	Modern salt glazed drain pipe. Within (6).
08/01	Top soil.
09	Dark soil with small stones.
10	Orange clay with gravel. Probably a natural glacial deposit.
11	Cut for pipe trench. Cuts (2) and filled by (5) and (6). Sealed by top soil (1).

Trench 2

01	Top soil
02	Orange clay and gravel with stones; some stones up to 0.30m x 0.10m, greywacke. Cut by (4), seals (10).
03	Black soil with orange clay lenses. Cut by (4). Seals 10.
04	Cut for field drain trench. Filled by (5) and (6) and cuts (2) and (3).
05	Dark loamy soil, stone free. Contains (6). Fill of (4).
06	Field drain. Associated with (5).
07	Cut from pipe trench. Cuts (3) and filled with (8).
08	Blue-grey soil with occasional stone fragments. Fill of (7), contains (9).
09	Modern drain pipe.
10	Orange clay with gravel. Probably a natural glacial deposit.

7 APPENDIX 2 – Site Photographs (digital images in site archive)

Photo no.	Description	Taken from	Date
OP1	General view pre-excavation	S	03.07.17
OP2	General view pre-excavation	NE	"
OP3	General view pre-excavation	N	"
OP4	General view pre-excavation	NE	"
OP5	Trench 1, drain (12)	N	"
OP6	Trench1, general view – central section	-	"
OP7	Trench1, general view – SW section	-	"
OP8	Trench1, general view – NE section	-	"
OP9	Trench 1 – detail of drain (3)	N	"
OP10	Trench 1, general view, post-excavation	NE	"
OP11	Trench 2, general view pre-excavation	S	04.07.17
OP12	Trench 2, drain cut 4 + drain (6)	SW	"
OP13	Trench 2, drain cut 7 and pipe (9)	SW	"
OP14	Trench 2, general view	S	"
OP15	Trench 2, drain (6) detail	SW	"
OP16	Trench 2, general view, (2) in foreground	NW	"

8 APPENDIX 3 – Entry for Discovery & Excavation in Scotland 2016

Local authority: Dumfries and Galloway

Parish: Glasserton

Site name: Old Place of Monreith

Name of contributor: John Pickin

Type of project: watching brief

Name of organisation:

NGR: NX 3812 4301

Report: A watching brief was undertaken over 3-4 July 2017 during ground breaking works for new drains and replacement down pipes. Two machine trenches were excavated, one against the building's north-west facing wall and the other against the south-west facing wall. Hand-made horse-shoe field drains, probably 19th century, were recorded in both trenches and appear to have been used for rainwater drainage. The deposits had been disturbed by modern drainage and path laying operations and no other significant archaeological features were recorded.

Location of report: DGC HER and HRHE (intended)

Funder: The Landmark Trust

Contact details of organisation: High Weirston House, Leswalt, Stranraer DG9 0RQ