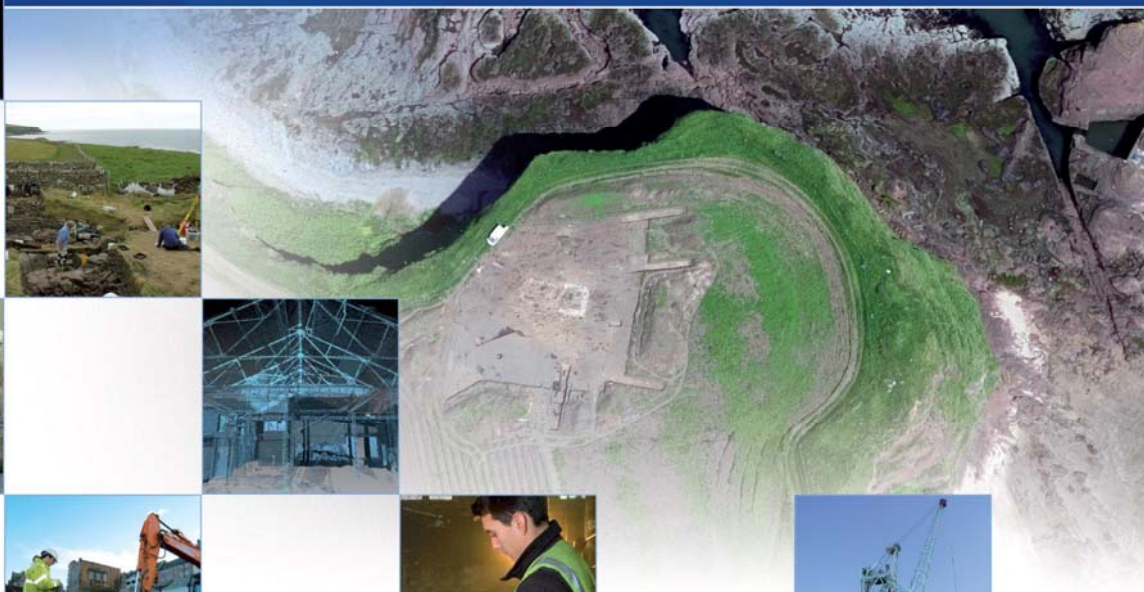


**Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray:**  
**Archaeological Monitored Topsoil Strip Report**  
**AOC 22492**  
**Oasis No.1- 178975**  
May 2014



ARCHAEOLOGY

HERITAGE

CONSERVATION

# Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray: Archaeological Monitored Topsoil Strip Report

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On Behalf of: Grant & Geoghegan

National Grid Reference (NGR): NJ 2168 5786

AOC Project No: 22492

Prepared by: Rob Engl

Illustration by: Jamie Humble

Date of Fieldwork: 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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Date: 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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## Abstract

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An archaeological monitored topsoil strip and evaluation was required by Grant and Geoghegan on behalf of their client as a condition of planning consent (14/00381/APP) on ground breaking works associated with the construction of a single dwelling house and associated new woodland at Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray (NGR: NJ 2168 5786). The scope of the works was determined by Moray Council as advised by Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service (ACAS), in keeping with the policies outlined in SPP (2010) and PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology (Scottish Government 2011).

The removal of sterile topsoil up to 0.40 metres in depth across the development area revealed neither significant archaeological features nor artefactual material. No further works are recommended.

## 0 NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

0.1 A programme of archaeological works including an archaeological monitored topsoil strip and evaluation was required by Grant and Geoghegan on behalf of their client at the site of a proposed single dwelling house and associated new bank of woodland at Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray (NGR: NJ 2168 5786). The work was required in response to a planning condition (14/00381/APP) set by Moray Council, who are advised on archaeological matters by the Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service (ACAS). The archaeological works required were in accord with *Scottish Planning Policy* (Scottish Government 2010) and PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology (Scottish Government 2011).

0.2 The monitored topsoil strip and evaluation revealed sterile sandy topsoil ranging between 0.20 m to 0.40 m in depth. The topsoil lay immediately over natural sands and gravels. Neither significant archaeological features nor artefactual material were unearthed by the watching brief. No further works are recommended.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 A programme of archaeological works including an archaeological monitored topsoil strip and evaluation was required by Grant and Geoghegan on behalf of their client at the site of a proposed single dwelling house and new bank of woodland at Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray. The work was required in response to a planning condition set by Moray Council (14/00381/APP), who are advised on archaeological matters by the Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service (ACAS). The archaeological works required were in accord with *Scottish Planning Policy* (Scottish Government 2010) and PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology (Scottish Government 2011).

### 1.2 Curatorial control

1.2.1 This programme of works was designed to fully satisfy the requirements of Moray Council, as advised on archaeological matters by ACAS. The *Written Scheme of Investigation* (AOC 2014) outlined the entirety of the archaeological programme of work needed to mitigate the effects of the proposed development, it detailed principally the methodology to be employed in implementing the archaeologically monitored topsoil strip.

### 1.3 Site Location

1.3.1 The proposed development is located on agricultural land at Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie NGR: NJ 2168 5786. The site is bounded to the west by an existing farmyard and to the north and south by pasture. Mature woodland bounds the site to the east.

## 1.4 Archaeological Background

- 1.4.1 The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and the Local Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) both record that the development area potentially lies within the vicinity of the reputed ancient Palace of Birnie, the first residence of the Bishops of Moray (NMRS No. NJ25NW 04, SMR No. NJ25NW0003). There are now no visible traces above ground, but the foundations were said to have been cleared away in 1802 during land reclamation. It is held that foundations of the Episcopal residence were dug up in the corner of a field called Castle Hill, although it is not recorded which corner, or how extensive the foundations were. On the 1846 1st edition and the 1888 2nd edition OS maps a large farmstead is also shown in the field (in the NW corner) with the name of Castlehill. The maps show a U-shaped steading, three rectangular buildings and a large rectangular garden. Fieldwalking was undertaken across the field in 2011, following its first ploughing for over 10 years. Although the place name has been linked to the bishop's palace, in the mid 19th century the Rev George Gordon noted that the name had been transferred from another farm. This appears to have been confirmed by the sparsity of medieval material recovered by the fieldwalking, although the farmer reported that large stone slabs had been found when it had last been ploughed. Evidence of later prehistoric activity was found in the form of a few sherds of pottery suggesting a possible settlement site on this low rise (NMRS No. NJ25NW 57).
- 1.4.2 The NMRS also lists the possibility of an earthwork being present close to the development area, described as a motte which may be related to the Bishops of Moray (NMRS No. NJ25NW 27).
- 1.4.3 As a greenfield site, there also exists the possibility that hitherto unrecorded remains such as prehistoric settlement as indicated by the pottery sherds recovered from adjacent fields may be present within the site boundaries.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objectives of the Archaeological Monitored Topsoil Strip were:
- i) to monitor the topsoil strip of the proposed house plot, drive and septic tank as well as the excavation of c.20% of the new woodland area in order to prevent the destruction of significant archaeological features prior to their recording;
  - ii) given the discovery of significant archaeological material that will suffer an adverse impact from the development (ie, where preservation *in-situ* is impractical), the recording of all archaeological features by means of a mitigation strategy to be formulated with ACAS.

### 3 METHOD

- 3.1 The ground breaking works were carried out by means of a Mechanical Digger equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. Excavation was in shallow units/spits. All machine excavation was supervised by an experienced field archaeologist.

### 4 RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The Monitored Topsoil Strip and archaeological evaluation was carried out under dry weather conditions on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

- 4.1.2 The various data gathered from the monitored top-soil strip and archaeological evaluation are presented as a series of appendices:

Appendix 1 contains the photographic register;

Appendix 2 contains the trench register;

Appendix 3 reproduces the '*Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*' entry.

#### 4.2 Overview

- 4.2.1 The monitored topsoil strip incorporated a rectangular block of land approximately 40.0 m by 20.0m in area and incorporated the proposed drive, house-plot and drainage.
- 4.2.2 The topsoil strip revealed sterile, sandy red-brown topsoil 0.20 m to 0.40 m in depth. This immediately overlay a subsoil of sands and gravels.
- 4.2.3 Two forty metre evaluation trenches were excavated to the eastern side of the development within the proposed area of new woodland. These again revealed a sterile sandy topsoil overlying sands and gravels.





**Plate 1: Area under monitored topsoil strip from east**



**Plate 2: Trench 1 post-excitation from south**

## **5 CONCLUSION**

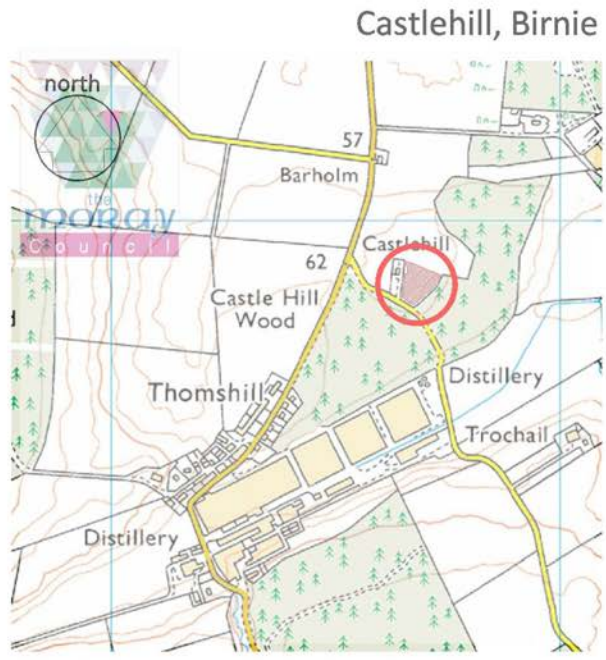
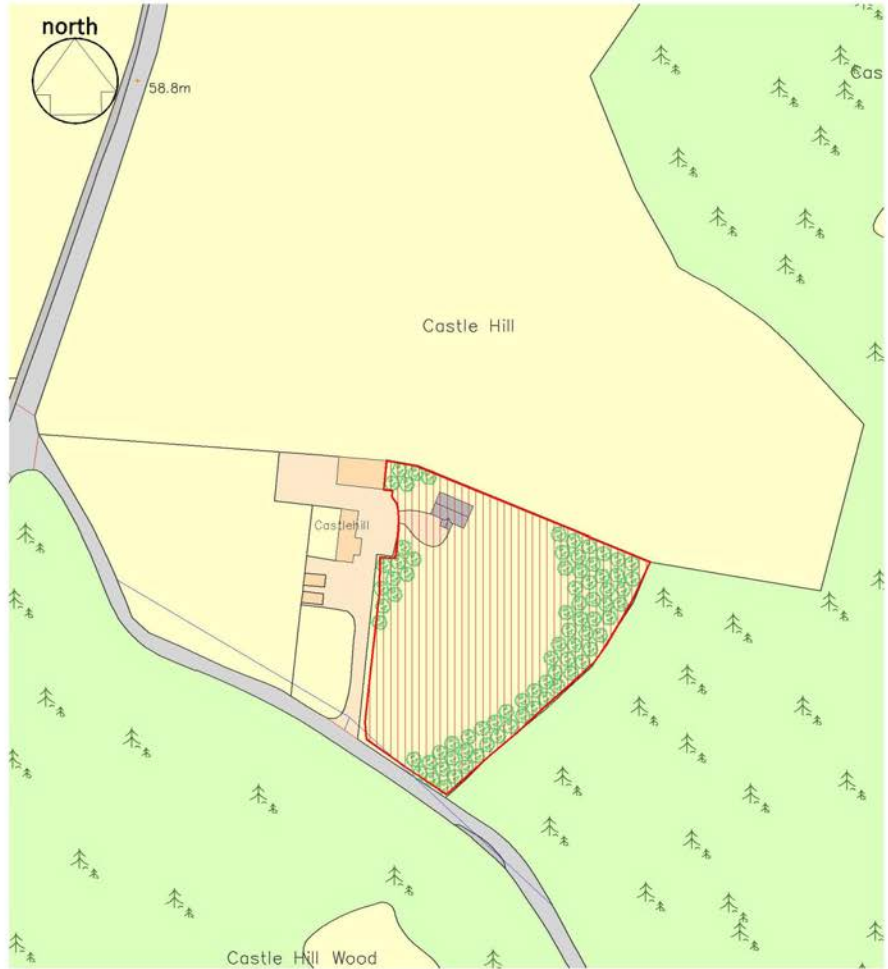
- 5.1 No significant archaeological deposits were revealed and therefore no further archaeological works are recommended. This recommendation will require ratification by ACAS on behalf of Moray Council.

## **6 REFERENCES**

AOC 2014 Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray; *Written Scheme of Investigation*, Unpubl AOC Archaeology Client Report

Scottish Government 2010 *Scottish Planning Policy*.

Scottish Government 2011 *PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology*.






os map

Figure 1: Site Location, based on a drawing supplied by the client





Figure 2: Location of Archaeological Evaluation Trenches and Monitored Topsoil Strip

-  Area of Monitored Topsoil Strip
-  Evaluation Trench
-  Site Boundary

Based on a drawing supplied by the client



# **Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray: Archaeological Monitored Topsoil Strip Report**

## **Section 2: Appendices**

## APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

### Film 1 Digital

Frame	Description	From
1	Registration	
2-4	Pre-excavation shots of the development area	S
5-8	General working shots of topsoil strip	E
9-10	General working shots of topsoil strip	W
11	Trench 1 post-excavation	S
12	Trench 2 post-excavation	S

## APPENDIX 2: EVALUATION TRENCH RECORD

### Trench 1

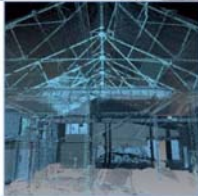
<i>Dimensions</i>	40.0 m by 2.0 m
<i>Orientation</i>	N-S
<i>Top-soil Depth</i>	0.30 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.35 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Other Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Orange sands and gravels
<i>Finds</i>	None

### Trench 2

<i>Dimensions</i>	40.0 m by 2.0 m
<i>Orientation</i>	N-S
<i>Top-soil Depth</i>	0.30 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.35 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Other Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Orange sands and gravels
<i>Finds</i>	None

**APPENDIX 3: DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND REPORT**

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Moray Council
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray; Archaeologically Monitored Topsoil strip
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	22492
<b>PARISH:</b>	Birnie
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Rob Engl
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	AOC Archaeology Group
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Monitored Topsoil Strip & Archaeological Evaluation
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	None
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	None
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	None
<b>NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)</b>	NJ 2168 5786
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2014
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2014
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (inc DES)</b>	None
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	<p>An archaeological monitored topsoil strip and evaluation was required by Grant and Geoghegan on behalf of their client as a condition of planning consent (14/00381/APP) on ground breaking works associated with the construction of a single dwelling house and associated new woodland at Castlehill, Thomshill, Birnie, Moray (NGR: NJ 2168 5786). The scope of the works was determined by Moray Council as advised by Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service (ACAS), in keeping with the policies outlined in SPP (2010) and PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology (Scottish Government 2011).</p> <p>The removal of sterile topsoil up to 0.40 metres in depth across the development area revealed neither significant archaeological features nor artefactual material. No further works are recommended.</p>
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	None
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRATIONS:</b>	N/A
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	Grant & Geoghegan
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	AOC Archaeology Group
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>	admin@aocarchaeology.com
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION</b>	Archive to be deposited in NMRS



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