

**56a Ardrossan Road, Seamill,
North Ayrshire:
Archaeological Mitigation**

Data Structure Report

by Louise Turner

issued 8th June 2010



Rathmell

Archaeology Ltd


Quality Assurance

This report covers works which have been undertaken in keeping with the issued brief as modified by the agreed programme of works. The report has been prepared in keeping with the guidance of Rathmell Archaeology Limited on the preparation of reports. All works reported on within this document have been undertaken in keeping with the Institute of Field Archaeology's Standards and Policy Statements and Code of Conduct.

Signed 

Date ...8th June 2010.....

In keeping with the procedure of Rathmell Archaeology Limited this document and its findings have been reviewed and agreed by an appropriate colleague:

Checked 

Date ...8th June 2010.....

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Introduction

1. A programme of archaeological works was required by Mr Ray Nicholson, in respect to the building of a garage and associated work at 56a Ardrossan Road, East Ayrshire. The archaeological works are designed to mitigate the impact on the archaeological remains within the development area to the agreement of North Ayrshire Council.
2. The development site lies to the rear of a large villa, now subdivided into two properties, forming part of an earlier garden which once covered a greater extent. Earlier archaeological works carried out in this same area (Rees, 2007) describe this original land holding in greater detail. Much of this current landholding now incorporates the summit and western slopes of The Fort, a known archaeological site which previous excavation has shown to be a fort of Iron Age date, located on the summit of a low knoll.
3. North Ayrshire Council required archaeological mitigation of earlier works carried out without an archaeologist present, and the monitoring of all outstanding works which including the creation of a stair from the rear of the house to a drying green on the summit of the mound above. The West of Scotland Archaeology Service, who advise the planning authority on archaeological matters, provided guidance on the structure of archaeological works required on this site.

Archaeological and Historical Background

4. The desktop study did not identify the presence within the study area of any sites protected for their archaeological or historical merit under the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 or buildings protected under the Town and Country Planning Act 1997 (Historic Scotland 1998). Nor were any sites identified that have the potential to contain the burial of human skeletal material, and hence raise the difficulties of the crime of violation of sepulchre (the common law crime of unlawful interference with human remains).
5. The development area is immediately southwest of the known site of a later prehistoric to early historic fort (WoSASPIN 5574). A sequence of similar small forts, including Seamill, are referred to in the New Statistical Account (1843-5, vol 5, pg 257).
6. The fort at Seamill occupies a tongue of land projecting from the end of the south bank of the ravine of Kilbride Burn. Christison, in 1893, notes only a massive rampart, 8ft above the interior, cutting off the narrow neck by which it is approached. However, when excavated in May 1880 ramparts were noted following the oval summit of the mound, enclosing an area measuring 90ft by 60ft:
On the side looking to the sea there were two walls, an outer and an inner, about 5 or 6 feet thick, and only a few yards apart, which coalesced into one at the north-western apex" (Munro 1882, 61)
7. Extensive material culture was recovered from the site during the 1880s excavation, suggesting an original use of the fort in later prehistory with a continuation or re-use of the site during the 4th to 7th centuries AD.
8. When the site was visited previously in 2007, it was described as 'now mainly covered by a lawn which continues to the natural slopes on the N, S and SW sides. The remains of the fort comprise a rampart and ditch on the SE, with the rampart continuing for 16m along the NE side, where it is 1m wide and 1.4m high. It has been cut into by the lawn, exposing a stony construction. On the SE, the rampart is 3m wide, rising 3m above the lawn, and 4m above the ditch, which is about 13m wide and 3m deep. In recent years the past owners, through the use of the interior of the fort, exposed a number of items of material culture, identified by Mr Crispin Flower (WoSAS) as spindle whorls' (Rees, 2007, 5).



Figure 1a: Roy's Military Map (1747-55) Showing Seamill And Nearby Enclosures

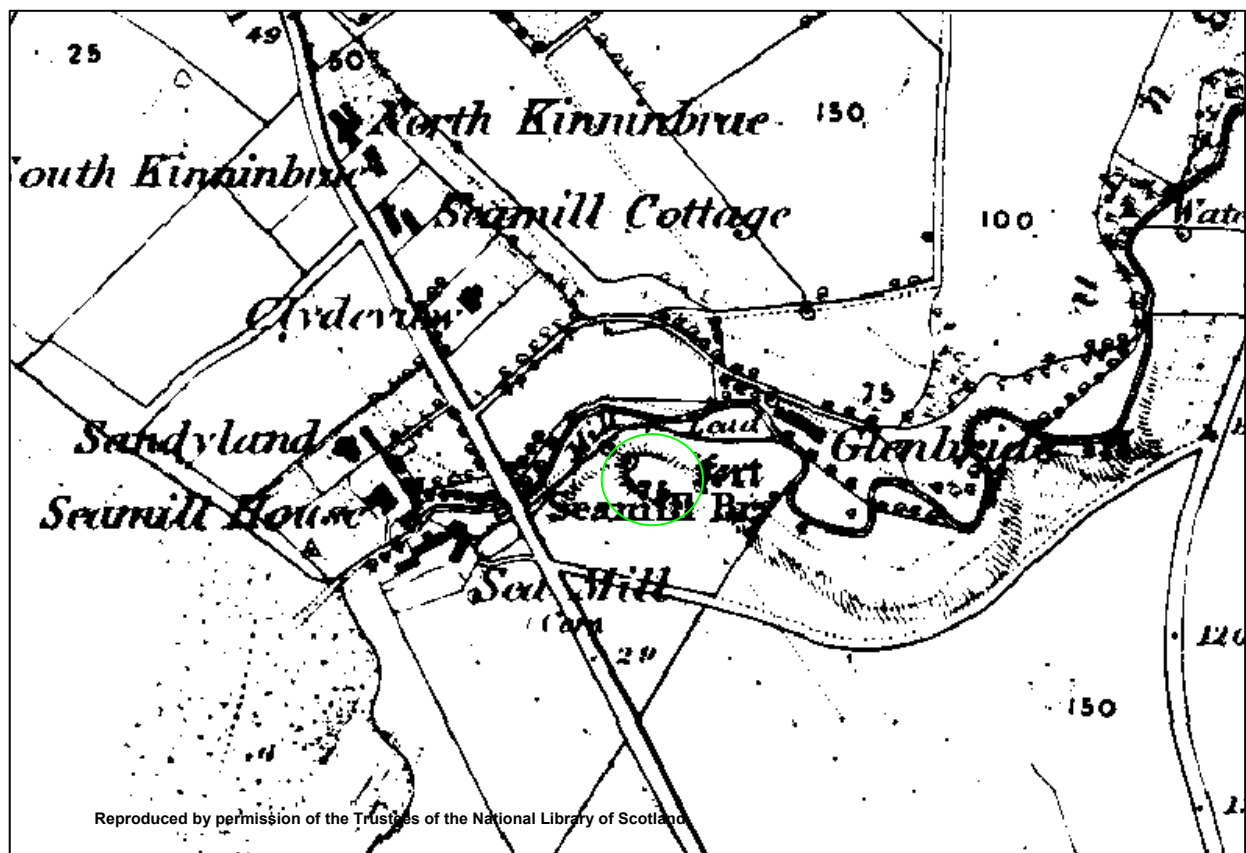


Figure 1b: Excerpt from 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1858

9. The earliest map evidence that shows the area in basic detail is Roy's Military Map (1747-1755) (Figure 1a). It shows a settlement at Seamill comprising four structures and two enclosures. The structures are adjacent to the Kilbride Burn, below the site, while the enclosures may be on the higher ground now occupied by the 19th century houses. The northeastern enclosure appears to be oval in plan and may be the fort.
10. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1858) (Figure 1b) illustrates that there has been significant development in the area, predominantly with the establishment of a more extensive road network and an expansion of Seamill. In regards to the development area the site is blank hillside, with a bluff shown to the northwest and the fort depicted to the northeast. Subsequently, in the late nineteenth century, a substantial mansion was built on the site. This construction saw the landscaping of the slopes below Seamill Fort.

Project Works

11. The programme of works was carried out on the 4th June 2010 (Figure 2a). It took the form of the recording of all sections exposed in previous works, and the archaeological monitoring of all ground breaking activities as described as agreed with the West of Scotland Archaeology Service and North Ayrshire Council. The latter included the hand-digging of a stairway running up the side of the mound, and six socket holes for low pole-mounted lights on the summit of the mound.
12. Any exposed features were investigated to determine their archaeological significance.. All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Policy Statements and Code of Conduct and Historic Scotland Policy Statements.

Findings: Monitoring

13. Excavation works carried out prior to the arrival of the archaeologist had been undertaken using a mini-digger. They comprised a rectangular area measuring approximately 6m by 6m in extent, which had been levelled into the side of the mound to a relative depth of 4m in places. The resulting sections were cleaned and recorded by photograph and drawing as appropriate, with all exposed strata characterised and evaluated.
14. No features of definite anthropic origin were identified in either section. The SW-facing section (Figures 3a-b) revealed a dark band of topsoil (001) which was markedly thicker (as thick as 0.45m in places) towards the base of the hill. This overlay a horizon of paler red-brown sand (002), flecked with occasional fragments of charcoal, which represents an earlier buried soil horizon.
15. A lens of shells 0.1m thick (003) lay directly beneath (002) on the summit of the mound. Unfortunately, this could not be investigated further as it was a localised deposit, the extent of which could not be fully established but which had previously been disturbed by activities on the top of the mound, as frequent fragments of limpet and periwinkle were found dispersed within the topsoil during the later monitoring work. Particular care was taken to recover any lithics which may have been present in association, but none were identified.
16. Below this thin layer of shell (003), the underlying deposits were clearly geological in origin. A thick band of gritty sand (004), filled with frequent inclusions of angular stones measuring up to 0.2 by 0.15m in extent, overlay another layer of sand which was much less stony in character (005). This in turn overlay very stiff, compact clay (006). The SE-facing section (Figure 4 a & b) was similar, with a further stony layer (007) revealed at the base. These observations confirmed that the knoll was glacial in origin.
17. The monitoring of the stairway revealed no change to the previous observations (Fig. 5 a & b). In the lower half, works immediately reached subsoil with nothing of interest noted. It was in the upper levels, which carried the proposed stair up onto the summit of the mound itself, which proved likely to be of greater archaeological interest.

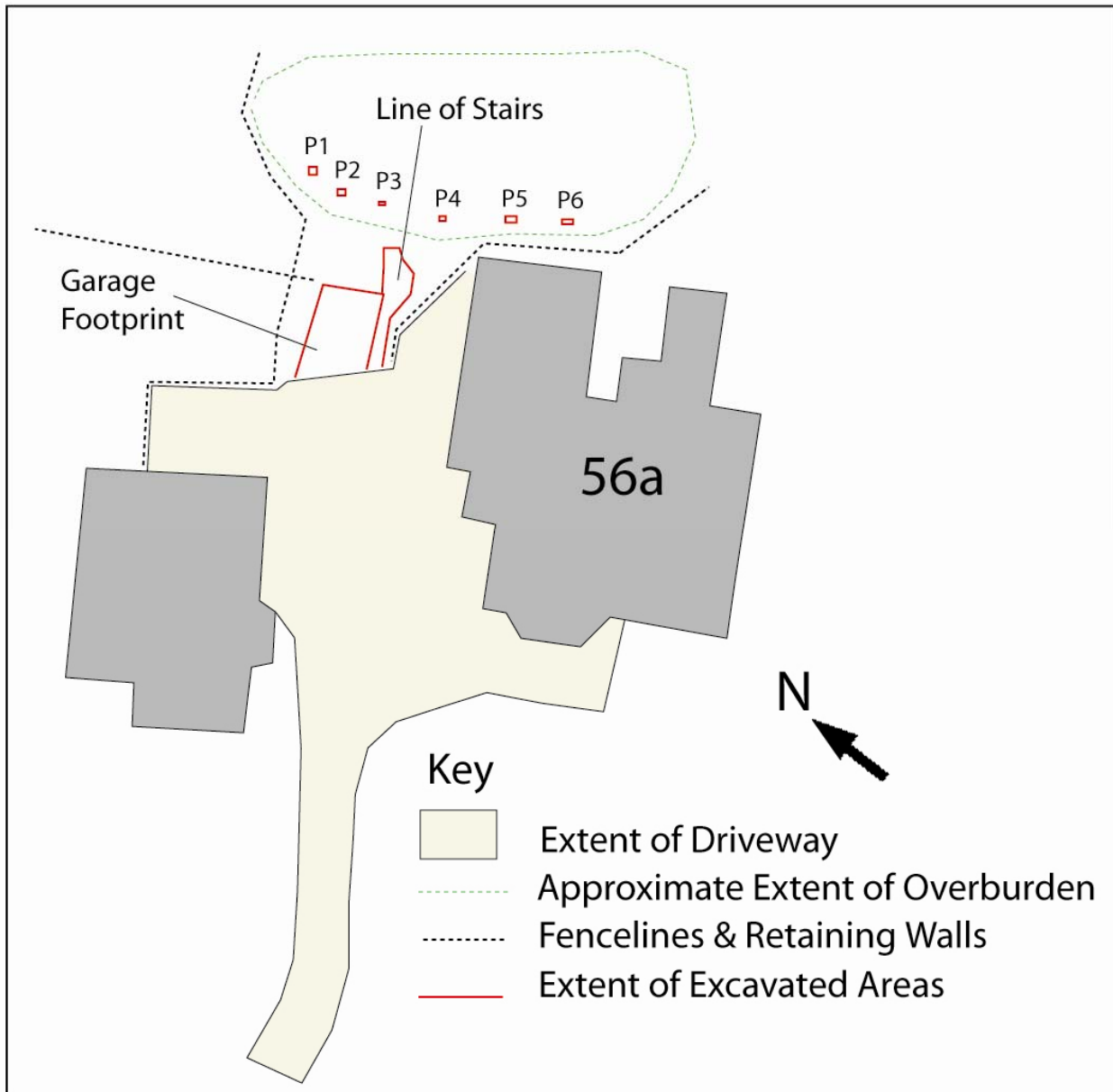


Figure 2: Site Plan



Figure 3a: SW-facing Section of Garage Footprint, N side

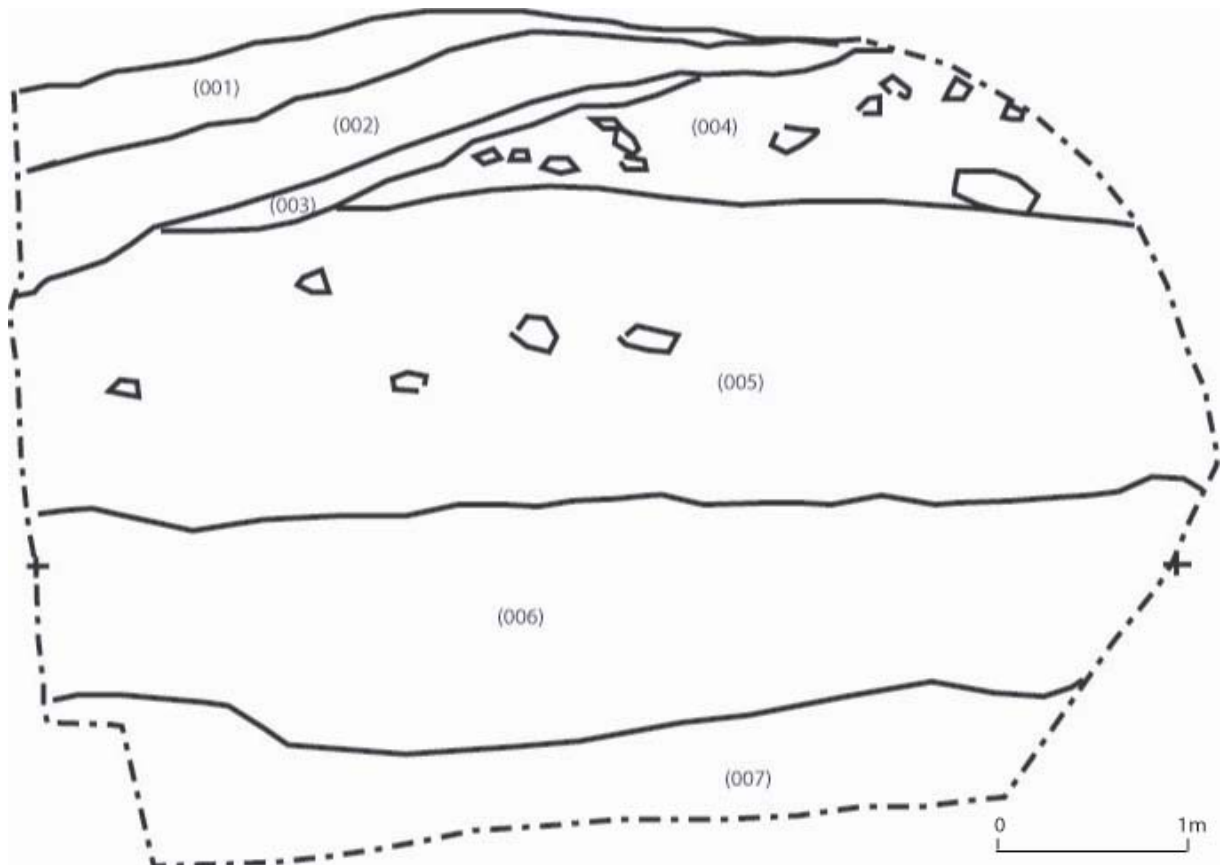


Figure 3b: SW-Facing Section of Garage Footprint – Section Drawing



Figure 4a: SE-Facing section of Garage Footprint, W side

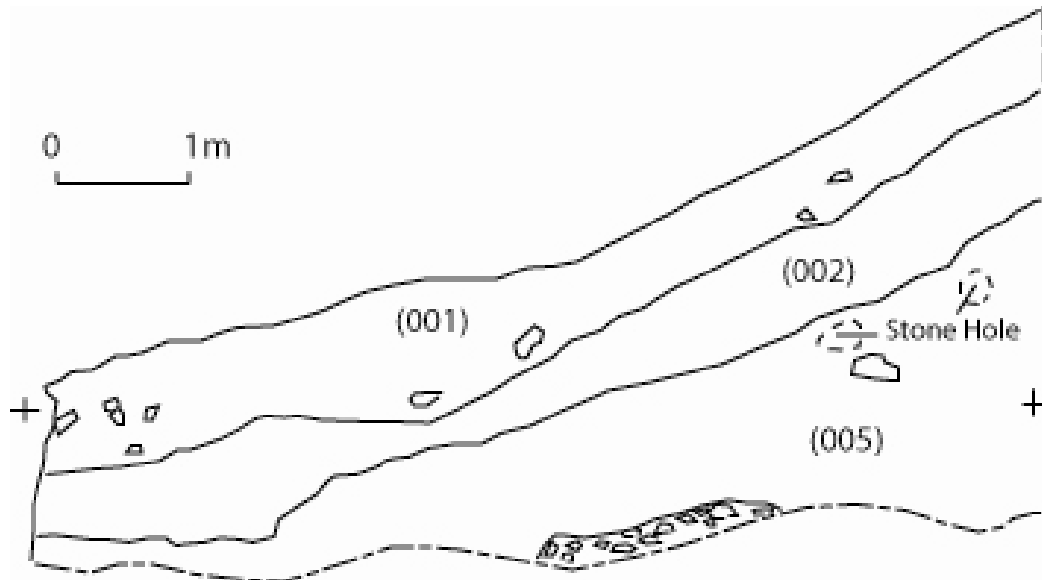


Figure 4b: SE-Facing Section of Garage Footprint, W side - Section Drawing

18. Here, topsoil (001) again overlay an earlier horizon which must have accumulated during the early post-glacial period and which was therefore most likely to reveal features of archaeological significance. Quantities of angular stone were observed during the digging, but further investigation revealed no clear evidence of structure and it proved impossible to understand what this dense concentration of stony material might actually represent.
19. Following a detailed inspection of the SW-facing section, it seemed likely that this stony material represented the eroded remains of stony layer (004) which had been exposed at the surface following the construction of an earlier pathway contemporary with the original house. Further work revealed a concentration of similar stones (009) in the N-Facing section at the upper stage of the stair, which appeared to have resulted from artificial accumulation (Fig. 6a and b).
20. This material was contained entirely within the topsoil, with a modern glass milk bottle from United Dairies and a fragmentary roofing-slate found in association. It was therefore interpreted as modern, probably representing stone clearance from the summit of the mound or perhaps a simple revetment intended to reduce soil erosion. There was no trace of any structural remains, representing either a stone rampart or an earth-and-stone bank, within the earlier soil horizon (002).
21. The final phase of works was to monitor the digging of postholes for the erection of six small pole-mounted lights on the summit of the mound. This area had been used to distribute the spoil from the earlier excavations, and the monitoring of these postholes was used as a means of establishing the depth of the overburden across the extent of the site.
22. The postholes were hand-dug by the archaeologist. There were six in total, running in a line down the W edge of the mound and located at roughly equal distances along its length. Each measured 0.3 by 0.3m in extent, and reached a depth of 0.38m maximum. At the N end of the site, the remains of the buried turf horizon were revealed at the base of the posthole at a depth of 0.32m. At the S end, the amount of overburden was greater, with the buried turf horizon not yet reached at a depth of 0.38m.

Discussion

23. The cutting of the garage footprint into the side of the mound provided a clear and comprehensive view of the underlying substrata which made up the mound, and thus allowed the feature's origin to be clearly understood. This in turn helped highlight those layers which might be of potential archaeological interest and inform upon the nature of the deposits exposed during the building of the stair.
24. The mound itself was clearly glacial in origin, being composed of a variety of sands and clays, varying markedly in the amount of stone content present. These were overlain by a band of red-brown silty sand (002), which reflected a long period of non-intensive use throughout the later prehistoric and medieval period. Occasional flecks of charcoal were noted in this layer, but there were no concentrations, and the deposit was artefactually sterile, which suggests that this portion of the mound may not have been subject to intensive use during its occupation of the fort.
25. The band of shells (003) noted in the SW-Facing section of the garage footprint was of potential interest. Munro mentions the finding of similar concentrations of shell and bone during the 1880s excavations at the site, and it is possible that this localised concentration of material had an anthropic origin. Unfortunately, the work carried out on the summit of the mound could not clarify this further. Frequent finds of shell were encountered in the topsoil, suggesting that this layer had previously been more extensive, but that it had been truncated by earlier activities on the summit of the mound. Occasional finds of bone, though possibly associated, could not be confirmed as such for they were, once again, dispersed throughout the topsoil. No artefacts were recovered.



Figure 5a: Excavation of Stair: Lower Levels



Figure 5b: Excavation of Stair: Upper Levels



Figure 6a: N-Facing section at Summit of Mound, featuring Stone Spread

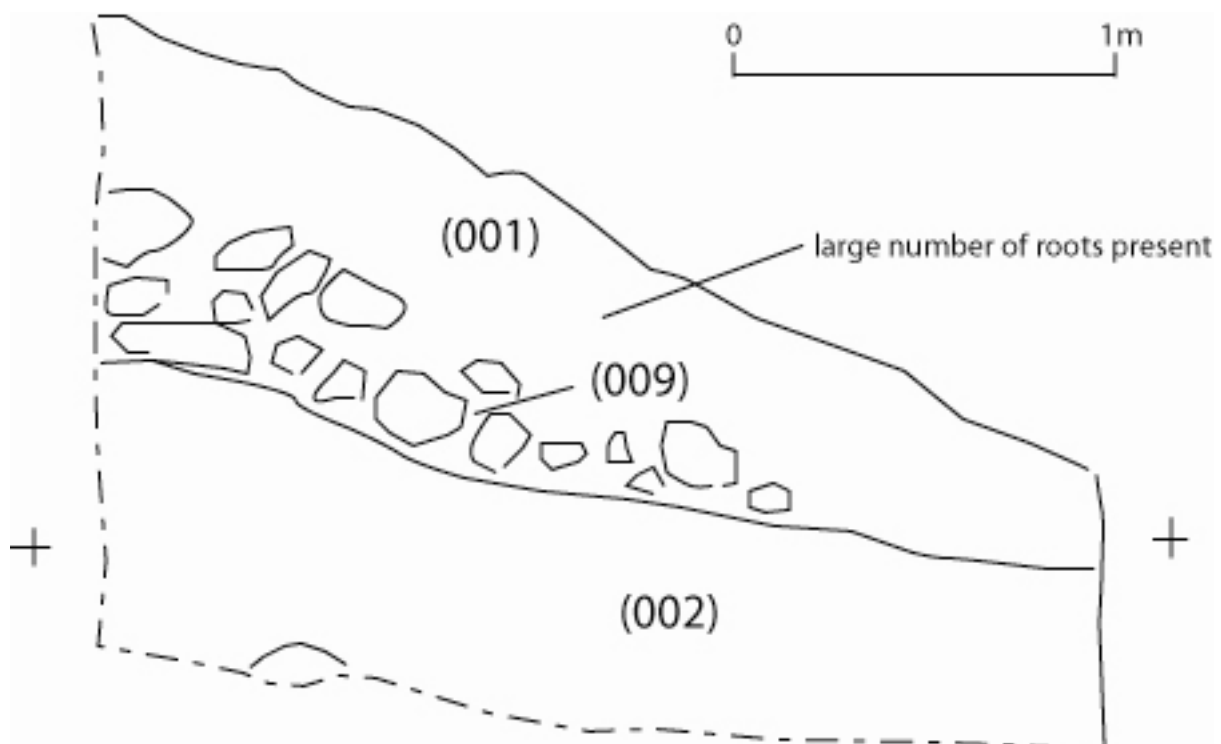


Figure 6b: N-Facing Section at Summit of Mound, featuring Stone Spread (009) - Section Drawing

26. Looking at this shell lens in its wider context, it clearly predated the early post-glacial horizon (002) and lay immediately above a stony layer (004) that appeared to be of glacial origin. Any association with the fort's occupation therefore seems doubtful and it may in fact be of natural origin.
27. There were no traces of any structural features which might be associated with the occupation of the fort. Though an unusually dense concentration of stones was noted during works carried during the digging of the stair in the area located towards the summit of the mound, this had no clear structural integrity and was very ephemeral in nature, contrasting strongly with Munro's descriptions of a double rampart.
28. As work progressed, it was possible to establish that this stony material was derived from two sources. It included material eroding out from the upper surface of the band of stony glacial material (004), which was probably exposed during the cutting of an earlier stair, created as a landscape feature in association with the pre-existing house structure. This had perhaps been accumulated and dumped in a heap or bank at the time of its removal, as a small pile of angular stones (009) was revealed in the section of the stair at the upper staging. This was contained within the topsoil, indicating a recent origin, and it incorporated within it a fragment of modern glass and a roofing slate (not retained).
29. The final stage of works was to monitor the digging of postholes for the erection of six pole-mounted lamps upon the western edge of the summit of the mound. This area had been covered by the soil removed from the garage footprint, and the sinking of these postholes gave an opportunity for the depth of this material to be evaluated. It confirmed that the overburden reached a depth of 0.3m over its extent, with the depth increasing to 0.38m deep at the S end. Vegetation still survived *in situ* at the base of the postholes, which indicated that the turf had not been removed prior to the dumping of the spoil.

Recommendations

30. The archaeological monitoring works comprised the recording of those archaeologically sensitive areas already impacted upon by the creation of the garage footprint, an area on the W side of the mound measuring approximately 6m by 6m in extent. It also included the monitoring of groundbreaking works undertaken in association with the creation of a stairway cut into the side of the hill, following the line of an earlier predecessor and of six small postholes, dug into the summit of the hill to receive a series of pole-mounted lamps. The latter were cut into a spread of overburden dumped across the extent of the summit, comprising the material previously removed from the garage footprint.
31. The purpose of the archaeological works was to determine the nature, form and extent of the archaeological resource within those areas adversely impacted upon by the development
32. No significant archaeology was observed within those areas impacted upon by the development and indeed it was likely that there had been previous disturbance to the mound, at least in this location, at an earlier date, perhaps contemporary with the construction of the house or the use of the mound as a private garden.
33. In this instance, the absence of significant archaeology in the works to date does not militate against the survival of significant features on this site relating to the fort. While on balance, we recommend that no further archaeological work should be carried out in relation to this specific development, the summit area in particular remains archaeologically sensitive and this should be recognised in any future development proposals.
34. The appropriateness and acceptability of our recommendations rest with North Ayrshire Council and the West of Scotland Archaeology Service.

Conclusion

35. A programme of archaeological works was carried out on behalf of Mr Nicholson, in respect to the building of a garage and small-scale landscaping works in the garden ground to the rear of 56a Ardrossan Road, Seamill.
36. The work entailed the recording of archaeologically sensitive material exposed at an earlier date, plus the archaeological monitoring of the application area during the construction of a stair onto the mound and six postholes sunk through recently deposited overburden in order to accommodate pole-mounted lamps. The archaeological works were designed to mitigate the impact on the archaeological remains within the development area.
37. No significant archaeological deposits were revealed and no anthropic material was recovered, other than that which indicated modern use of the site. As a result, no further works are recommended with regards to these works.

References

Munro, R, 1882, Notice of Excavations Made on an Ancient 'Fort' at Seamill, Ayrshire, Historical & Archaeological Collections of Ayrshire and Wigtonshire, Vol. 3

Ordnance Survey, 1854-59, *1st edition 1:10560 county series*

Rees, T, 2007, 56a Ardrossan Road, Seamill, North Ayrshire: Archaeological Evaluation, Unpublished Data Structure Report, Rathmell Archaeology Ltd., Kilwinning

Roy, 1747-55, *Military Survey of Scotland*

Appendix 1: Registers

Within this appendix are all registers pertaining to works on-site regardless of the process by which that information was gathered.

Context Register

Context No.	Area/ Trench	Type	Description	Interpretation
001	Site	Deposit	Loose, humic dark brown/black silty sand, with occasional modern finds (roofing slate, glass milk bottle) and potential disturbed material of earlier date (marine shell, animal bone). Varies in depth from 0.3m (at the summit) to 0.45m towards the base of the knoll.	Topsoil .
002	Site	Deposit	Compact red-brown silty sand, with occasional charcoal flecks and isolated small stones measuring up to 0.06 x 0.07m in extent. Varies between 0.3m and 0.4m in depth.	Buried soil horizon, accumulated in the post-glacial period.
003	Site	Deposit	Deposit of marine shell forming a lens up to 0.2m deep. It directly overlies the latest of the glacial deposits that make up the core of the knoll.	Located too high within the section to be fully investigated, may reflect natural accumulation or could possibly be of anthropic origin.
004	Site	Deposit	Grey-brown silty sand, with frequent inclusions of angular stones measuring up to 0.2 x 0.2m in extent, with occasional larger boulders measuring up to 0.4 x 0.2m in extent.	Natural subsoil, of glacial origin.
005	Site	Deposit	Compact pink brown sand, of a similar consistency to severely weathered bedrock.	Natural subsoil, of glacial origin.
006	Site	Deposit	Very compact pink-brown silty clay.	Natural subsoil, of glacial origin.
007	Site	Deposit	Partially exposed layer of angular stones, set within a grey silty sand matrix and similar in character and appearance to 002.	Natural subsoil, of glacial origin.
008	Garage Footprint	Structure	Line of grey granite chips	Course of earlier footpath (recent)
009	Summit of Mound	Stone spread	Low spread of stone, measuring 0.8m in width and 0.2m high. It is set within topsoil (001) and its length is unknown.	Modern in date. May represent a dump of stone cleared from the summit of the mound during its use as a garden, or an ornamental feature.

Context No.	Area/ Trench	Type	Description	Interpretation
010	Summit of Mound	Deposit	Spread of redeposited subsoil, red-brown in colour and predominantly comprising a loose silty sand with frequent inclusions of small angular stones measuring up to 0.2 x 0.2m in extent. Varies in depth between 0.32m (N end) and 0.38m (S end)	Overburden, comprising material removed from garage footprint and redeposited upon the summit of the mound.

Photographic Register

Image No.	Print		Slide		Digital	Description	From	Date
	Film No.	Neg. No.	Film No.	Neg. No.				
01	-	-	-	-	001	General view showing stairs under construction	WSW	04/06/10
02	-	-	-	-	2	Garage Footprint – SW-facing Section, N side	SW	04/06/10
03	-	-	-	-	3	Garage Footprint – SW-facing section, S side	S	04/06/10
04	-	-	-	-	4	Garage Footprint – SE-Facing Section, S side	SE	04/06/10
05	-	-	-	-	5	Garage Footprint – SE-Facing Section, N side	SE	04/06/10
06	-	-	-	-	6	As above, detail of basal deposits	SE	04/06/10
07	-	-	-	-	7	General Working Shot of Stairs under construction	WSW	04/06/10
08	-	-	-	-	8	Walling (009) revealed in N-Facing Section, Summit of Mound	N	04/06/10
09	-	-	-	-	9	Section at top staging of stair	N	04/06/10
10	-	-	-	-	10	Posthole 1, Post-excavation	E/vert	04/06/10
11	-	-	-	-	11	Posthole 2, Post-excavation	N/vert	04/06/10
12	-	-	-	-	12	Posthole 3, Post-excavation	E/vert	04/06/10
13	-	-	-	-	13	Posthole 4, Post-excavation	N/vert	04/06/10
14	-	-	-	-	14	Posthole 5, Post-excavation	N/vert	04/06/10

Image No.	Print		Slide		Digital	Description	From	Date
	Film No.	Neg. No.	Film No.	Neg. No.				
15	-	-	-	-	15	Posthole 6, Post-excavation	N/vert	04/06/10

Drawing Register

Drawing No.	Sheet No.	Area/ Trench	Drawing Type	Scale	Description	Drawn By	Date
1	1	Garage Footprint	Section	1:20	SW-Facing Section	CLT	04/06/10
2	2	Garage Footprint	Section	1:20	SE-Facing Section	CLT	04/06/10
3	2	Stair Cutting	Section	1:10	Walling 009 Revealed in Section	CLT	04/06/10

Appendix 2: Discovery & Excavation in Scotland

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	North Ayrshire
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	56a Ardrossan Road, Seamill
PROJECT CODE:	RA10043
PARISH:	West Kilbride
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Louise Turner
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Rathmell Archaeology Limited
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	NS24NW 10
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Fort
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NS 202 471
START DATE (this season)	4 th June 2010
END DATE (this season)	4 th June 2010
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (may include information from other fields)	<p>An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the site of a prehistoric fort at Seamill. Now situated within the limits of a private garden, the mound upon which the fort was located had in part been slighted following the sinking of a footprint for a garage.</p> <p>Nothing of direct archaeological significance was found, but the exposed horizons were recorded and further monitoring works undertaken on the line of a stairway and six postholes for pole-mounted lighting dug into overburden recently deposited upon the surface of the mound.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Mr Nicholson
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	Unit 8 Ashgrove Workshops, Kilwinning, Ayrshire KA13 6PU
E MAIL:	contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Report to West of Scotland Archaeology Service and archive to National Monuments Record of Scotland.

Contact Details

38. Rathmell Archaeology can be contacted at our Registered Office or through the web:

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39. The West of Scotland Archaeology Service can be contacted at their office or through the web:

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t.: 0141 287 8332/3

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