

**Land to the south of Church Cottage
Townhead, Rothesay:
Archaeological Watching Brief**

Data Structure Report

by Alan Matthews

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1 Overview

- 1.1 This Data Structure Report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief undertaken on behalf of Mr Matts in respect of the construction of a two dwelling houses and associated works within land to the south of Church Cottage, Townhead, Rothesay. The archaeological works were designed to mitigate the impact on the archaeological remains within the development area.
- 1.2 The area concerned, prior to development works commencing, comprised the back yard of a monumental sculptor's premises, which consisted of open ground with some standing trees and two brick built garages. The western boundary of the area is the main road south out of Rothesay (B881). The development area sloped down towards the road.
- 1.3 Argyll and Bute council required that a watching brief be undertaken as a requirement of the issued planning consent (05/01107/OUT and 07/00677/REM). West of Scotland Archaeology Service had provided guidance on the structure of archaeological investigations required.
- 1.4 Rathmell Archaeology Limited was appointed by Mr Matts to undertake the development and implementation of archaeological mitigation works during the development within land to the south of Church Cottage, Townhead, Rothesay.

2 Historical and Archaeological Background

- 2.1 The development area stands within the settlement of Townhead to the immediate south of Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. The ground is depicted as undeveloped on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1869). Until recently the ground was used as a stonemason's yard and the demolition of a number of structures related to this phase of use was an element of the development process.
- 2.2 The first evidence we have for an urban settlement at Rothesay is 1400/1, when it was erected as a royal burgh. However, given that Rothesay Castle is mentioned in 1230 when it 'withstood a siege by norsemen' (Simpson, 1955), it is probable that a pre-burghal settlement existed prior to this period, the extent and pattern of which is not known. It is presumed though, that High Street would have been the focal point of the early burgh, forming a direct route from Rothesay Bay, up past the castle and leading to the parish church at Townhead.
- 2.3 Relatively little of the modern archaeological work undertaken around Rothesay has helped to establish a concise comprehension of the earlier pre-burgh settlement pattern. However, an excavation undertaken in 1999 on a cleared piece of ground between High Street and Mill Street (roughly 60m south of the castle & moat) revealed features and artefacts thought to pertain to the pre-burghal phase. These specifically included 13th and 14th century pottery and a discontinuous arrangement of features which appeared mostly agricultural in nature (Speller K, 1999). This may suggest an agricultural community sprawling between the Castle and the parish church to the south.
- 2.3 Townhead, lying to the immediate south of the burgh and castle, is likely to have developed as the religious hub of Rothesay through the presence of the medieval parish church. The 13th century medieval chancel survives at the site of church - St Mary's Chapel (NS06SE1) – along with other traces including St Mary's Well (NS06SE2). The double dedication of the site with St Brioc, a 6th century saint, also raises the potential for a much earlier Christian centre. While the known core of this ecclesiastical complex lies to the immediate northwest of the development site, the modern road should not be accepted as a sound delimiter of activity.



Figure 1a: Pre-excitation, north end of development area.



Figure 1b: Pre-excitation, south end of development area.

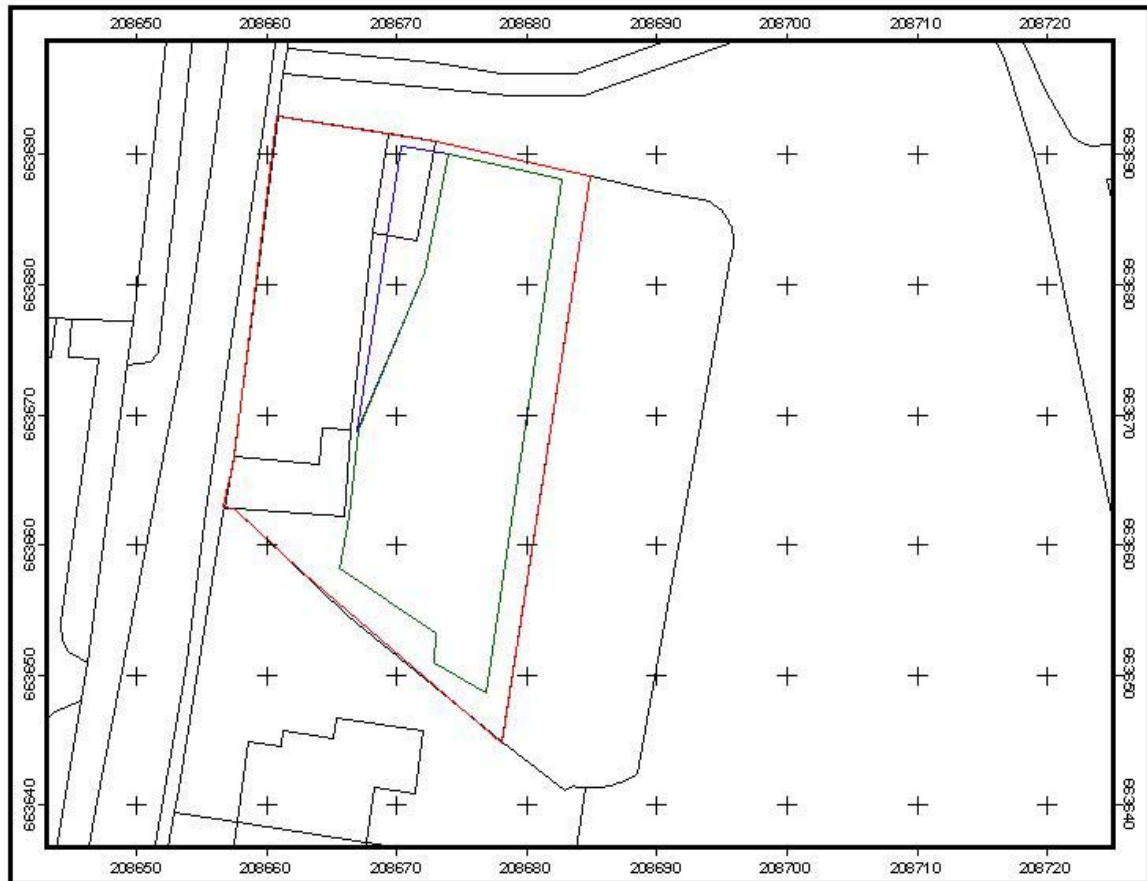
- 2.4 Indeed the earliest sound cartographic source, Roy 1747-55, depicts a cluster of buildings with an enclosure labelled Townhead. However, the road striking south from the burgh passes to the west of this collection of structures. This further highlights the potential for the extent of any ecclesiastical complex to operate independent of the modern road. Of note is the well attributed to St Mary, which lies to the east of the road, to the immediate north of Church Cottage.
- 2.4 Early twentieth century construction works in Townhead, located further to the south and west, exposed a pit containing Neolithic pottery and other diagnostic finds (NS06SE13). This illustrates the potential for sub-surface prehistoric archaeology to survive across Bute.

3 Project Works

- 3.1 The archaeological works took place on the 2nd of September 2008. The works were originally to have included archaeological monitoring of the demolition, removal of floor slabs and foundations of any upstanding structures on site, followed by archaeological monitoring of any soft sediment ground breaking works including levelling of the site and excavation for foundations and services.
- 3.2 In response to the needs of the client and the circumstances of the development the entire area intended for the house plots was stripped, using a 13t 360 excavator down to natural subsoil. This approach was also thought to give the best possible chance of locating small negative features or other ephemeral archaeological material which may not have been easily picked up in the midst of large scale bulk soil removal.
- 3.3 The natural soil proved to be shallow and easily recognised. Once the areas of the two house plots were stripped it was possible to demonstrate that there was no reasonable chance of survival of archaeological material beneath the two structures remaining on site. After consultation with West of Scotland Archaeology Service it was agreed that archaeological monitoring of the demolition of structures was unnecessary as was further archaeological presence on site.
- 3.4 All of the area monitored was reduced to the level of natural subsoil and any potential archaeological features investigated. Very few features were observed in the natural subsoil and any disturbance was confidently deemed to be of modern or natural origin. No artefacts of a pre-1900s date were recovered from anywhere on site.
- 3.5 All works complied with WoSAS Standard Conditions, the Institute of Field Archaeology's Standards and Policy Statements and Code of Conduct and Historic Scotland Policy Statements.

4 Findings

- 4.1 In compliance with the terms outlined in the Method Statement all of the excavated area was reduced to the level of natural subsoil. Typically this meant reduction to a depth of between 350mm and 550mm. The subsoil consisted of very compact pinkish-brown gravelly sand. The slope of the natural subsoil was the same as the slope of the existing ground level towards the road. This meant that the depth to natural was uniform across the site and the likelihood of disturbance, other than the placement of the two modern structures, was low.
- 4.2 The intention of the developer was to level the site for construction of the two houses by excavating into the slope and removing spoil from the site. In order to better understand the archaeological potential of the development area the site was stripped to natural subsoil before any bulk soil removal took place. Examination of the subsoil across the entire footprint of the build of the houses, and the recognition that the subsoil is archaeologically sterile, has enabled us to evidence that there is no possibility of the proposed development works disturbing archaeological sediments.



- Limits of Development Area**
- Limits of Archaeological Monitoring**
- Limits of Building Footprint**

Figure 2: Site plan.

- 4.3 The composition of the subsoil was not uniform across the entire site. In a few places there was evidence of disturbance by plant roots. These were small shallow patches of extremely humic soil. Another shallow spread towards the southern edge of the area contained only modern material and may have been a crude attempt at levelling of the site. In Several places the in-situ bedrock was visible at a depth of less than 600mm.
- 4.4 The two structures remaining on site and due to be demolished have been recessed into the slope of the natural subsoil in order to provide level ground for their construction. To the northern end of the development area the depth of this recess can be as much as 900mm. There is therefore no reasonable possibility of significant archaeological deposits surviving beneath the two structures. After consultation with West of Scotland Archaeology Service we were able to conclude that the development area could be considered archaeologically sterile and no further on site works were required.
- 4.5 The subsoil appeared to be archaeologically sterile and the consistency of the slope towards the road suggest that there has been little disturbance or landscaping of the site other than in modern times.

5 Discussion

- 5.1 No archaeologically significant features were observed anywhere on the site and no artefacts other than modern were recovered during the course of the archaeological works. Despite the proximity of the site to known archaeological sites and historic buildings there is no evidence for disturbance on the site other than 20th century development. It would appear that any activity which is pre-1900s has failed to leave a lasting mark on the development area.
- 5.2 There is no evidence that the site has been recently landscaped resulting in the removal of a pre-1900s archaeological traces. The pre-development slope of the area and of the surrounding area appears to be entirely consistent with the slope of the natural subsoil and bedrock. The fact that we were able to expose the natural subsoil across the entire footprint of the two proposed houses means that we are able to say with confidence that the development area is archaeologically sterile.
- 5.3 From the complete lack of archaeological evidence recovered from the strip of the development area we are forced to conclude that no pre-1900s activity has left quantifiable evidence on the site.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The archaeological monitoring failed to identify any significant archaeological features or artefacts within the development area. Consequently, we recommend that no further archaeological works are appropriate. As per our findings, after consultation with West of Scotland Archaeology Service we are able to conclude that no further on site works were required. We further recommend that no post-excavation analysis be carried out as no archaeologically significant material was recovered in the course of the archaeological monitoring works.
- 6.2 The appropriateness and acceptability of our recommendations rest with Argyll and Bute Council and the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, their advisors.



Figure 3a: Excavation area cleared to natural subsoil and bedrock.



Figure 3b: Showing reduction of natural subsoil for structures.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Archaeological monitoring was carried out on the 2nd of September 2008 on behalf of Mr Matts in respect to the construction of two dwelling places, planning numbers (05/01107/OUT and 07/00677/REM), to be erected on land to the south of Church Cottage, Townhead, Rothesay. These archaeological works were designed to mitigate the impact on the archaeological remains within the development area.
- 7.2 The archaeological monitoring identified no significant archaeological remains, and the exposed subsoil appeared to be free of any disturbance other than that which was obviously obviously post-1900. On balance we have illustrated that this development will not adversely impact on any archaeological remains and we recommend that no further archaeological works are appropriate.

8 References

8.1 *Bibliographic References*

SODev	1994	<i>National Planning Policy Guideline 5, Archaeology and planning</i> , Scottish Office Development Department.
SOEnd	1994	<i>Planning Advice Note 42, Archaeology</i> , Scottish Office Environmental Department.
Simpson, W D	1955	<i>Rothesay Castle and the Norse seige of 1230</i>
Speller, K	1999	<i>Mill Street/High Street, Rothesay</i> , Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

8.2 *Cartographic References*

Roy, William	1747 – 55	Roy's Military Maps
Ordnance Survey	1857	<i>First Edition, Ordnance Survey</i>
Ordnance Survey	1879	<i>Second Edition, Ordnance Survey</i>

Appendix 1: Photographic Register

Image No.	Print		Slide		Digital	Description	From	Date
	Film No.	Neg. No.	Film No.	Neg. No.				
1	-	-	-	-	144	Pre-excavation shot of site	N	2/9/08
2	-	-	-	-	145	Pre-excavation shot of site	NE	2/9/08
3	-	-	-	-	146	Pre-excavation shot of site	SE	2/9/08
4	-	-	-	-	147	Pre-excavation shot of site	NW	2/9/08
5	-	-	-	-	148	Northern half, working shot	N	2/9/08
6	-	-	-	-	149	Southern half working shot	S	2/9/08
7	1	36	2	37	-	ID Shot	-	2/9/08
8	1	35	2	36	150	Section showing Topsoil and natural	W	2/9/08
9	1	34	2	35	151	House plot 2	W	2/9/08
10	1	33	2	34	152	House plot 1	S	2/9/08
11	-	-	-	-	153	Height of subsoil next to garage	S	2/9/08
12	-	-	-	-	154	Height of subsoil next to garage	N	2/9/08

Appendix 2: Context Register

Context No.	Area/Trench	Type	Description	Interpretation
001	-	Deposit	Blackish Brown Humic Silt	Topsoil
002	-	Deposit	Pinkish Brown Sandy Clay	Re-deposited subsoil/leveling material
003	-	Deposit	Orange Sand and Gravel	Natural
004	-	Deposit	Mid-brown with black and pinkish-brown gravel	Natural gravels and Iron Stone.

Appendix 3: Discovery & Excavation in Scotland

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Argyll and Bute
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Kirkhope, Rothesay
PARISH:	Rothesay
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Alan Matthews
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Rathmell Archaeology Limited
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	None
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	None
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NS087636
START DATE (this season)	2 nd September 2008
END DATE (this season)	2 nd September 2008
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	None
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (may include information from other fields)	Archaeological monitoring was carried out in respect to the construction of two dwelling places, to be erected on land to the south of Church Cottage, Townhead, Rothesay. This work identified no significant archaeological remains, and the exposed subsoil appeared to be free of any disturbance other than that which was obviously post-1900.
PROJECT CODE:	08007
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Mr Matts
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ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Report to West of Scotland Archaeology Service and archive to National Monuments Record of Scotland.

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