



*Highland Archaeology Services Ltd*

## Archaeological Watching Brief Gordonstoun School, Moray



## Report and Recommendations

Report No. HAS050101

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## CDROM Contents

Digital photographs (JPEG format)  
 Photograph index (Excel 2003 format)  
 Site plans (ArcView 3.2 shapefile format)  
 This report (Adobe Acrobat 6 PDF format)

## Summary

*An archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief were carried out at Gordonstoun School, Moray, in response to a planning condition. Excavations for foundations for a new studio theatre, and associated service trenches, were observed and photographed. Wooden buildings, the tarmac surface of a former tennis court, and an area of turf were removed; beneath these surfaces lay approx 30-50cm of the topsoil giving way to sand beneath. There was a notable dark mineral pan at the interface. No archaeologically significant features or finds were recorded, and there are no recommendations for further work.*

## Introduction:

Construction of a new studio theatre at Gordonstoun School, Moray, began in late October 2004. Condition 8 attached to the planning permission issued by Moray Council required an archaeological watching brief on site works. This work was carried out to meet that requirement, covering the site clearance for the new building, as well as the excavation of selected service trenches.

The archaeological planning condition arose in this case partly because archaeological features have been noted in the area, and partly because the contractors had just completed another building at Gordonstoun School and found '3 – 4 flat stones, isolated from anything else'. However no details of this find were available.

The brief was to attend the groundbreaking, observe, record, and report. The area cleared for the new building was approximately 500 sq metres; of this, about 27 sq metres were cleaned by hand. Prior to this, a trial area, approximately 3m x 1.8m and oriented north-south, was cut by machine.

The purpose of the work was to establish whether there was any buried archaeology on site, and if so, to obtain an indication of its nature and extent. Archaeological features that would be unavoidably damaged or destroyed by the development would be recorded and any finds recovered.

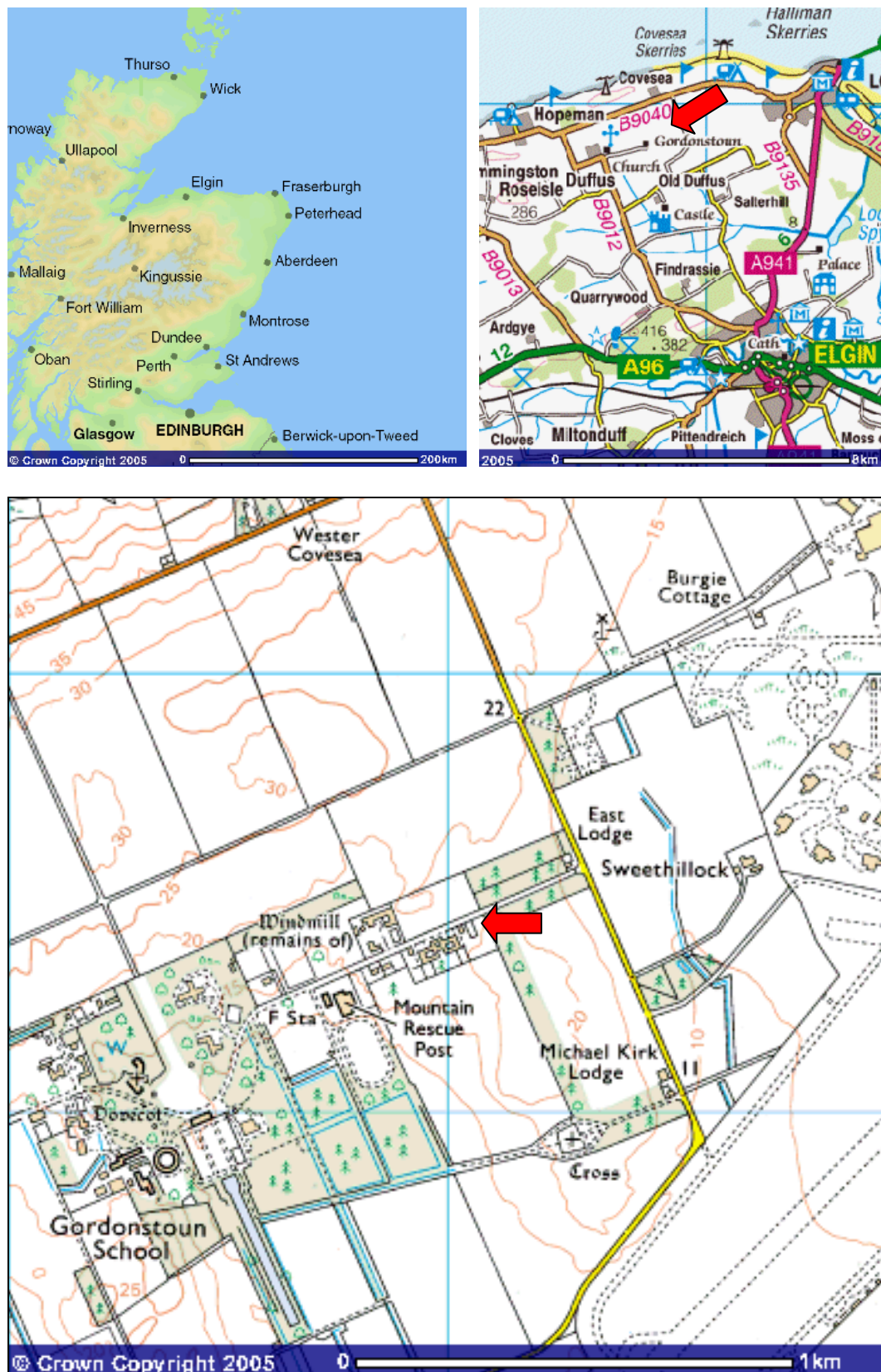
The work was carried out (and this report produced) for Highland Archaeology Services Ltd by John Wood MIFA. The weather was cloudy and dull but mainly dry.

## Location:

The site is centred approximately at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NJ 190 694

It is within the local authority area of the Moray Council, which is advised on archaeological matters by the staff of the Aberdeenshire Archaeology Service staff based within that Council's Planning and Economic Development department.





**Figure 1 Site location**

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## Site details:

The development area (within the safety fence) covers a total of approximately 3,349 sq metres, within the landscaped grounds of Gordonstoun School. This site had been occupied by a surfaced tennis court and several wooden buildings, set in mown grass with surfaced pathways. The subsoil was sand, with a strong mineral pan lying at the interface between this and the topsoil.

The site seems to have a long history of ploughing

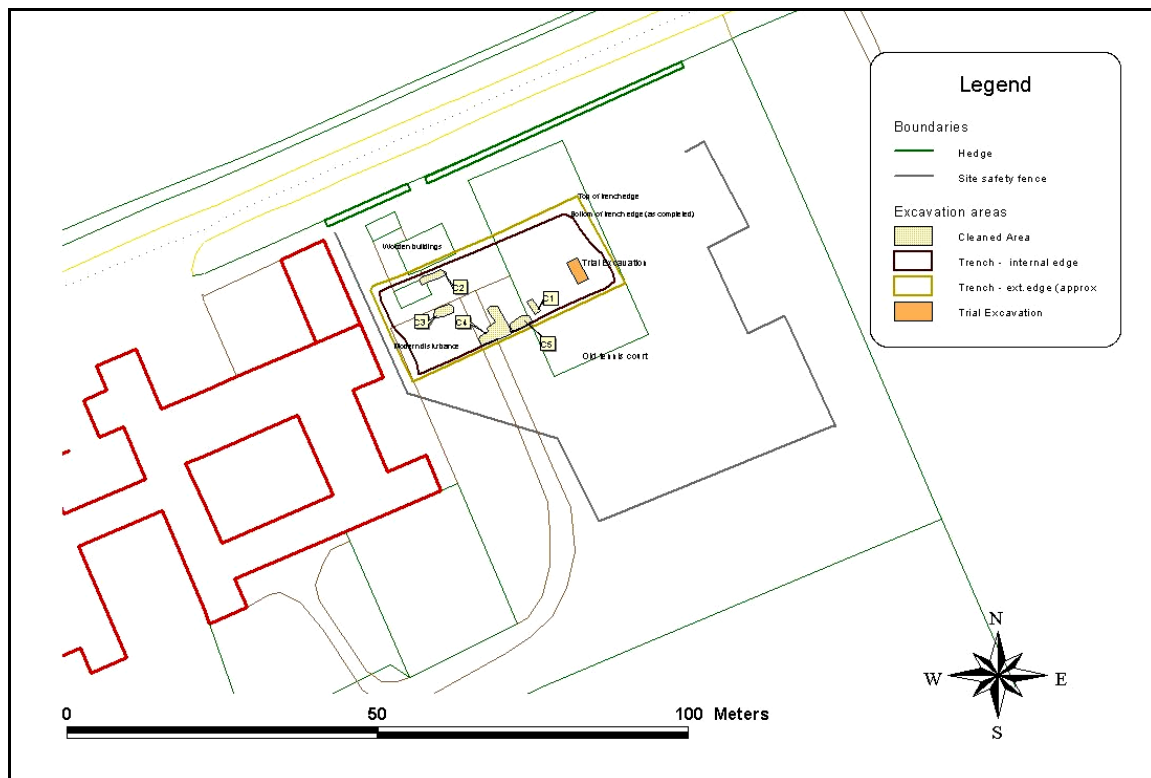


Figure 2 Site layout

## Aim of the Investigation:

To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains

To report the results and propose (if appropriate) a mitigation and recording strategy compliant with NPPG 5 (SOEND 1994) and PAN 42 (SOEND 1994)

## Method:

### Desk Based Assessment

The following early maps held by the National Library of Scotland were checked online:

- ca.1583-1601 - Pont 8: Moray and Nairn. (manuscript)
- ca.1583-1601 - [Gordon 23]: Pont's map of Elgin and northeast Moray. (manuscript)
- 1654 - Joan BLAEU - MORAVIA - Moray and Nairn.
- 1745 - Herman MOLL - The Shires of Murray and Nairn.
- 1830 - John THOMSON - Nairn and Elgin.
- 1912 - J.G. BARTHOLOMEW - Survey Atlas of Scotland
- 1921-28 - ORDNANCE SURVEY - One-inch "Popular" edition maps of Scotland

An online check was also made of the Moray SMR and the NMRS. E-mail contact was also made with the local authority's archaeological advisor, Ian Shepherd.



**Figure 3 From Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 1st edition map 1873**  
(Not to scale)

Gordonstoun School Grounds are included in the Register of Gardens and Designed Landscapes maintained by Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland. Otherwise there are no designated features or sites affected. Several buildings nearby are Listed, but the works did not affect these.

The Moray SMR draws attention to the discovery by Joseph Anderson in 1888 of a Bronze Age urn in Elgin Museum (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Vol 22



(1887-8) p343). He says, “This urn, which was found at Gordonstoun thirty years ago, has a peculiarly elegant shape.” It is unclear precisely where these came from (Moray SMR NJ16NE0010, NJ16NE0020). However vertical aerial photography in 1976 revealed parch-marks in the general area (though not on the development site itself) interpreted as ring-ditches, enclosures, and even possible square barrows and souterrains (stone-lined tunnels). (NMRS NJ16NE64-67).

## Walk-over survey and photographic record

An initial walk-over and risk assessment was undertaken by the writer on 25 October 2004. No upstanding features were noted. Monitoring of excavations took place on 25, 26 and 28 October 2004. Record photographs were taken of the wooden buildings on the site.



**Figure 4** Demolition of wooden buildings



**Figure 5** Site clearance in progress following demolition of wooden buildings

A further visit was planned to take place in November / December to coincide with the opening of a soakaway, but in the event this did not take place.

The soakaway was expected to be excavated during the week of 13 December 2004, and it was clear from the method statement prepared by the contractor that archaeological monitoring would be difficult and unlikely to produce results. The trench was to be 30m long x 0.45m wide and 2m deep; dug by machine into loose sand. Site ground conditions were such that for health and safety reasons observers had to be kept well back from the edge of the excavation. It was most unlikely that in these conditions any archaeology present could be satisfactorily recorded.

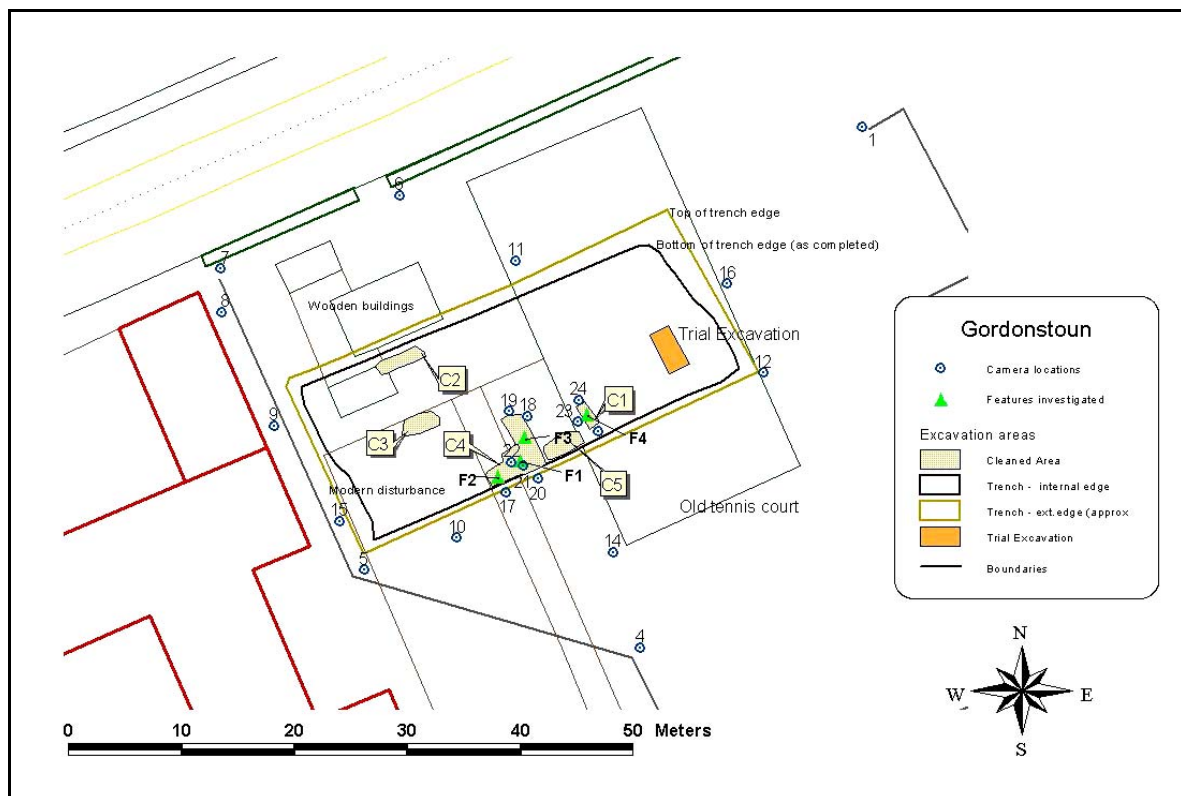


Figure 6 Excavations, features and camera locations

## Site stripping

An initial trial excavation was undertaken by machine to clarify the nature of the underlying subsoil. The surface of the subsoil was revealed and examined, then the trial area was deepened to provide a section.





**Figure 7 Trial excavation: N - S section on east side of excavation, after topsoil removal over the site.**  
Note leaching of mineral deposits into underlying sand

The topsoil was then stripped from the footprint of the new building using a mechanical back-acting JCB excavator with a 1.8m ditching (straight edged) bucket taking out spits of approximately 300mm to a depth of the topsoil. This produced a clean effective scrape on the sandy subsoil here. Where necessary the resulting surface was then trowelled to clarify potential archaeological features.

Mapping was done using a backpack CSI DGPS MAX unit linked to a pen computer running Penmap survey software. Differential correction was by Egnos, Omnistar and also terrestrial beacons, providing sub-metre accuracy. The results were then adjusted to the Ordnance Survey digital (Landline) background.

Palaeo-environmental sampling was not undertaken as part of this exercise.

Approx. 500mm of homogenous brown topsoil overlay sand, with an extensive mineral pan layer at the interface. This mineralised layer was very varied in nature and depth.

Along the western edge of the trench for the new building ran a modern disturbance containing 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> c. debris. This was apparently the result of recent fibre-optic cabling work.





**Figure 8** Modern disturbance along W side of trench

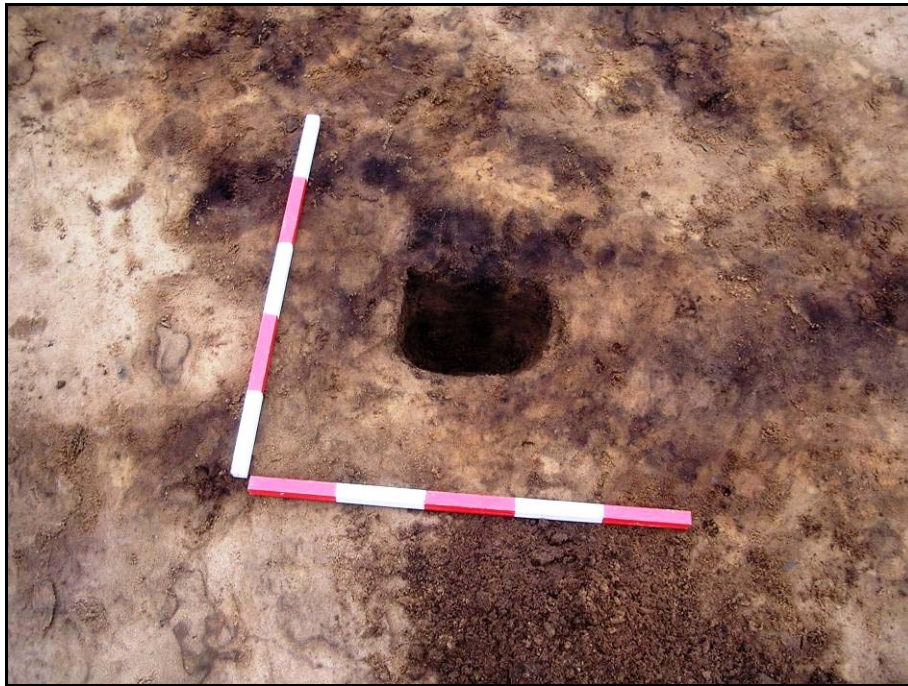


**Figure 9** Feature 1 before excavation

In the southern side of the trench, four potential archaeological features were noted. These were all ill-defined blackened areas. They were investigated to establish whether they could be the extremely truncated remnants of post or stake holes and so be archaeological in origin. This sort of evidence is common along the southern Moray Firth coastal lands, especially in areas (as at Gordonstoun) where crop-marks have been seen.



They were cleaned by hand and Features 1 and 4 were half sectioned, but it quickly became apparent that all of them represented natural variations in the mineral pan deposit.



**Figure 10 Feature 1 following excavation**

This proved to be a natural stone-hole which had attracted a concentration of mineralised deposits.



**Figure 11 Feature 2**



**Figure 12 Feature 4**

## **Monitoring of Services**

Open service trenches were inspected for possible archaeological evidence, but none was found.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The soil profile, including the mineralised layer, is consistent with extensive cultivation over many centuries which would have destroyed or severely truncated earlier archaeological features.

In this case the features observed are all the result of natural variations in the extensive mineral pan that lay at the interface between the sand and the topsoil. No finds were made, nor was any material found suitable for sampling for dating or other diagnostic purposes.

## **Recommendations**

There are no recommendations for further archaeological work at this site, but given the crop-mark evidence in the general area, further developments within the immediate area should be subject to archaeological watching briefs.

## **References**

- SOEND 1994 **National Planning Policy Guidance 5: Archaeology and Planning**  
SOEND 1994a **Planning Advice Note 42: Archaeology and Planning**



## Appendix 1: Recorded Archaeological and historical sites in the area of the development

SMR = Moray Sites and Monuments Record (maintained by Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service)

NMRS = National Monuments Record for Scotland

| SMR NO.    | NMRS NO.               | NAME  | CLASS (SITE TYPE)                         | Grid Reference                       | Notes  |
|------------|------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| NJ16NE0009 | NJ16NE.7.7             | GORDONSTOUN HOUSE - WINDMILL, DOVECOT           | WINDMILL, DOVECOT                         | NJ 1880 6941                         | Dovecot, former windmill   |
| NJ16NE0012 | NJ16NE.16.0; NJ16NE.43 | GORDONSTOUN, MICHAEL KIRK.                      | CHURCH, BURIAL-GROUND, MAUSOLEUM          | NJ 1922 6893                         | Church   |
| NJ16NE0006 | NJ16NE.7.0             | GORDONSTOUN HOUSE.                              | TOWER-HOUSE, COUNTRY HOUSE, SCHOOL        | NJ 1843 6898                         | Main school building   |
| NJ16NE0011 | NJ16NE.16.1            | GORDONSTOUN, MICHAEL KIRK, OGSTON MARKET CROSS. | CROSS                                     | NJ 1928 6892                         | Market Cross   |
| NJ16NE0045 | NJ16NE.44.             | MICHAEL KIRK.                                   | PICTISH CROSS-SLAB                        | NJ 192 688 (Gen ref for Gordonstoun) | Class II cross-slab, now in Elgin Museum, brought to Gordonstoun among stones from Drainie Kirk, which was demolished in 1953.                             |
| ?          | NJ16NE.7.11            | GORDONSTOUN HOUSE, WINDMILL COTTAGE.            |   | NJ 1884 6937                         | Cottage  |
| ?          | NJ16NE.7.1             | GORDONSTOUN HOUSE, EAST LODGE.                  | LODGE, GATE PIERS                         | NJ 1928 6956                         | Entrance Lodge   |
| ?          | NJ16NE.7.9             | GORDONSTOUN SCHOOL, FIRE STATION.               | FIRE STATION                              | NJ 1873 6925                         | School building  |
| NJ16NE0061 | NJ16NE.64.             | MICHAEL KIRK.                                   | RING-DITCHES, ENCLOSURE (POSSIBLE)        | NJ 1937 6881                         | Vertical air photography (BKS NJ16N 2636210, flown 9 July 1976) has recorded the cropmarks of ring-ditches and a possible enclosure.                       |
| NJ16NE0062 | NJ16NE.65.             | WINDMILL COTTAGE.                               | RING-DITCHES, SOUTERRAINS (POSSIBLE), RIG | NJ 1899 6916                         | Vertical air photography (BKS NJ16N 2636210, flown 9 July 1976) has recorded the cropmarks of ring-ditches, possible souterrains and rig. NMRS, MS/712/91. |

| SMR NO.    | NMRS NO.   | NAME                 | CLASS (SITE TYPE)  | Grid Reference | Notes   |
|------------|------------|----------------------|--|----------------|---|
| NJ16NE0064 | NJ16NE.67. | WINDMILL COTTAGE.    | BARROW: SQUARE (POSSIBLE), RING-DITCHES                          | NJ 1900 6966   | Vertical air photography (BKS NJ16N 2636210, flown 9 July 1976) has recorded the cropmarks of ring-ditches and a possible square barrow.                      |
| NJ16NE0027 | ?          | GORDONSTOUN          | Cropmarks; Enclosures  | NJ 1852 6942   | A sub-oval enclosure with linear feature, a possible larger enclosure, running in a NNE direction.  |
| NJ16NE0010 | ?          | GORDONSTOUN          | Food-vessels   | NJ 18 69       | Food vessel decorated with zig zags; no further information.  |
| NJ16NE0020 | ?          | GORDONSTOUN          | Bronze Age (incl beakers)  | NJ 18 68       | Beaker  |
| NJ16NE0030 | ?          | LOSSIEMOUTH AIRFIELD | Manors - Medieval (from 1100 AD)                                 | NJ 199 692     | Site of manor   |
| NJ16NE0031 | ?          | GORDONSTOUN          | Manor - Medieval (from 1100 AD)                                  | NJ 192 689     | Site of manor.  |
| NJ16NE0057 | ?          | PLEWLANDS            | Cropmarks; Enclosures; Rig & Furrow                              | Not available  | Crop-marks of rig and furrow and other features.  |
| NJ16NE0058 | ?          | LOSSIEMOUTH AIRFIELD | Cropmarks; Foundations; Rigs                                     | Not available  | Crop-marks of rig and furrow and buildings visible on a vertical aerial photograph.   |
| NJ16NE0059 | ?          | LOSSIEMOUTH AIRFIELD | Enclosures   | Not available  | Crop-marks of a rectilinear enclosure visible on a vertical aerial photograph.  |
| NJ16NE0060 | ?          | GORDONSTOUN          | Cropmarks; Features; Pits; Rig & Furrow; Ring-ditches; Trackways | Not available  | Crop-marks visible on a vertical aerial photograph may represent a prehistoric settlement and trackways. Rig & furrow and geomorphological marks also visible |

## Appendix 2: Photographs

All photographs were taken with a C3100 Nikon digital camera at 3.2mpx resolution.

| <b>GORDONSTOUN WATCHING BRIEF – PHOTOGRAPHS</b> |  |                 |             |
|---|--|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>Image No</b>                                 | <b>View (Nos. are camera locations)</b>  | <b>Taken by</b> | <b>Date</b> |
| DSCN1456  | General view across site, looking W, from 1  | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1457  | General view across site, looking NW, from 2                                       | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1458  | General view across site, looking NE, from 3                                       | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1459  | General view across site, looking NE, from 4                                       | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1460  | General view across site, looking N, from 5  | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1461  | Wooden buildings before demolition - looking N from 5                              | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1462  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking S from 6                               | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1463  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking SW from 6                              | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1464  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking SW from 6                              | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1465  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking E from 7                               | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1466  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking SE from 7                              | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1467  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking E from 8                               | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1468  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking ESE from 8                             | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1469  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking ENE from 9                             | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1470  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking E from 9                               | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1471  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking ESE from 9                             | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1472  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking N from 10                              | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1473  | Wooden buildings under demolition - looking W from 11                              | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1474  | Excavating - initial site clearance  | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1475  | Excavating - initial site clearance, showing mottled mineral pan layer             | JW              | 25/10/2004  |
| DSCN1483  | Sand surface as revealed by JCB  | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1484  | Sand surface as revealed by JCB  | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1485  | Trial excavation - E (i.e W facing) section following removal of topsoil over site | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1486  | View NNE from 14   | JW              | 26/10/2004  |

| <b>Image No</b> | <b>View (Nos. are camera locations)</b>                                  | <b>Taken by</b> | <b>Date</b> |
|-----------------|--|-----------------|-------------|
| DSCN1487        | View N from 14   | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1488        | View NNW from 14 following demolition of wooden buildings. Joins to 1489 | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1489        | View WNW from 14 following demolition of wooden buildings. Joins to 1488 | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1490        | View NE from approx 4  | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1491        | View E from 15. Trial exc. Location Shown by ranging poles               | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1492        | View E from 15. Trial exc. Location Shown by ranging poles               | JW              | 26/10/2004  |
| DSCN1715        | View W from 16   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1716        | View SW from 16 showing unexcavated remainder of tennis court            | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1718        | View ENE from 15   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1719        | View N from 15. Excavations completed on site of former wooden buildings | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1720        | View NE from 15  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1721        | View ENE from 15   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1722        | View E from 15: Disturbed area in W of trench containing modern debris.  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1723        | Feature F2 from N (approx 22)  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1724        | Feature F1. View E from 22   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1725        | Feature F1 unexcavated. View N from 21                                   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1726        | Trowelled area - north end of C4, view W from 18.                        | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1727        | Trowelled area C4, view S from 19.                                       | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1728        | Trowelled area C4, view N from 20  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1729        | Feature F1 from S before clean to west                                   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1731        | Trowelled area C1, showing F4. From 23                                   | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1732        | Trowelled area C1, showing F4. From 23 (close-up)                        | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1733        | Trowelled area C1, view N from 13  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1734        | Trowelled area C1, view S from 24  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1735        | Feature F1, excavated. View N from 21                                    | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1738        | Feature F4, sectioned E-W. View S from approx 24                         | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1747        | View ESE from approx 9. Joins to 1748                                    | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1748        | View SSE from approx 9. Joins to 1747                                    | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1749        | View NNE from approx 5. Joins to 1750                                    | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1750        | View ENE from approx 5. Joins to 1749                                    | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1751        | View W from 12. Joins to 1752  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |
| DSCN1752        | View WNW from 12. Joins to 1751  | JW              | 28/10/2004  |