



**Highland Archaeology Services Ltd**  
Bringing the Past and Future Together

## **Millburn (Phase 1) Access Drive**

### **Thrumster, Caithness**



## **Watching brief -Report**

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# Millburn Phase 1 (Access Drive) Thrumster, Caithness

## Watching brief - Report

<b>Report No.</b>	HAS100901
<b>Site Code</b>	HAS-TMN10
<b>Grid Ref</b>	ND 3252 4471
<b>Client</b>	A Scott
<b>Planning Ref</b>	08/00097/REMCA
<b>OASIS</b>	highland4-82280
<b>Date/ revision</b>	08/09/2010
<b>Author</b>	Paul Humphreys and John Wood

### Summary

*An archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief was undertaken in response to a planning condition during excavations for an access road serving a house-site at Millburn, Thrumster; nothing of archaeological significance was encountered.*

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## Acknowledgements

Background mapping has been reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217. Site plans have been kindly supplied by A Scott. The archaeologist on site was Paul Humphreys. Desk based assessment and report editing was by John Wood.

## Aims and objectives

- To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.
- To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to preserve these where possible and record where necessary in line with national and local policies and standards.
- To ensure that any artefacts or human remains are dealt with in accordance with legal requirements and current Historic Scotland policy guidance.

## Introduction

The construction a new private house scheme required as a condition of planning consent that an archaeological watching brief be conducted during site stripping. The area concerned is depicted on Figure 2 below; an extract of the OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6 inch map sheet XXIX; surveyed in 1872.

## Location and Setting

The site lies at Thrumster, centred approximately at OS grid reference ND 3252 4471 at about 70m above sea level (Fig. 1). It is located in partially improved crofting land on the periphery of the Yarrows archaeological relict landscape.

The long drive to the proposed house site opens on to the south side of the single track road from Thrumster that gives access to the Yarrows settlements. The northern aspect looks across largely unimproved or reverted land towards the hill of Tannach. The southern aspect overlooks the old dam that fed Thrumster mill (now a private dwelling) (Fig. 2). Yarrows and Warehouse hills lie to the south-west, with Thrumster House to the north-east (Plates 1 to 4).





**Figure 1 Site location**

*Reproduced from Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Mapping under licence. Not to scale.*

## Archaeology and policy background

Archaeological fieldwork was requested in this case because there was considered to be potential for finds or features of interest to be discovered during site works. The Yarrows archaeological landscape particularly noted for its cluster of Neolithic Chambered Cairns; Bronze Age cist burials and Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement. More recently evidence for Mesolithic activity has also been discovered. It was in the Yarrows Basin that the noted antiquarians Alexander Henry Rhind and Joseph Anderson developed their interest in antiquity. It is likely that this landscape has been exploited continuously since the Mesolithic, but it has largely escaped intensive cultivation until relatively recently.

The fundamental principles underpinning UK and Scottish policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*

(2002)<sup>1</sup> and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).<sup>2</sup> The current planning and policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*<sup>3</sup>, and the Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy* (SPP), issued in February 2010, which consolidates and supersedes the previous SPP and NPPG series<sup>4</sup>.

The new SPP states (paragraph 123)

Archaeological sites and monuments are an important, finite and non-renewable resource and should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible. The presence and potential presence of archaeological assets should be considered by planning authorities when allocating sites in the development plan and when making decisions on planning applications. Where preservation in-situ is not possible planning authorities should, through the use of conditions or a legal agreement, ensure that developers undertake appropriate excavation, recording, analysis, publication and archiving before and/or during development. If archaeological discoveries are made during any development, a professional archaeologist should be given access to inspect and record them.



**Figure 2** Extract from Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25'' map, surveyed 1875. *Inverness Mainland Sheet XII.13 (Combined). Not reproduced to scale. Courtesy of National Library of Scotland.*

<sup>1</sup> [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/8>

## Programme

A desk-based assessment was followed by the phase 1 watching brief for the construction of the access drive, which was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Highland Council.<sup>5</sup> The Council's archaeologist also requested that all field drains encountered should be investigated and recorded.

The proposed house site is located one field back from the road, requiring a long access drive running along the edge of a small field of arable land planted with barley (Fig. 3 & 4)(plate 5). The watching brief on construction of this road and the turning head (phase 1) is reported on here. A further report will cover additional excavations as necessary.

Phase 1 was started on June 30<sup>th</sup> and completed on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2010. The stripping of the long driveway was conducted using an 18 ton tracked 360<sup>o</sup> excavator fitted with a smooth-bladed ditching bucket and was completed on day one. Turf and topsoil were removed down to the first colour change which proved to be the plough-soil / clay till interface. Archaeological features were investigated by hand excavation in accordance with the specification set out in the WSI<sup>6</sup>. This was started on day one but required a second day's work for completion.

## Results

The weather conditions on June 30<sup>th</sup> were dry and sunny with a light breeze, deteriorating to overcast and windy the following day.

The topsoil throughout was undifferentiated being subject to recent ploughing; and comprised circa 300 mm of loam overlying the clay till. The only finds were occasional sherds of 19th and 20th century domestic pottery.

Stripping began at the road end of the drive where a palimpsest of linear features was encountered (Features 1-4). These proved to be working land drains (Plate 6). Sectioning of these features (Figs. 5 & 8 sections AA to DD) revealed constructional variations that suggest different phases of drain-cutting activity, possibly reflecting a succession of tenants. It did not prove possible to be definitive regarding the phasing of the field drain construction. After sectioning it was necessary to reconstruct each drain to preserve its function, as no modern field drains were encountered (Plates 16 to 26).

A 2.2 m wide ditch (F5) was also encountered running east-west along the line of the new drive. This ran alongside the current wire fence field boundary that runs along the top of an older boundary bank (F9) (Plates 7, 8 and 10). It was noted that this feature aligned with a relict ditch-and-bank land boundary to the north of the site (plate 9).

This feature is depicted on figure 2 as a ditch; however its relationship to the field boundary differs from the present day fence. Figure 2 also depicts the ditch continuing past the break in alignment of the field boundary (Fig. 3). This could not be seen during stripping; the cut appearing to terminate at the alignment break (Figs. 3 & 6). Beyond this point a second narrower cut was visible that proved to be a rumbling drain (Feature 7).

Both cut features were sectioned (Fig. 7)(Fig. 8 - section EE). The 2.2 m x 0.5 m deep wide ditch cut had a relatively small amount of silting with no evidence for decayed vegetable matter suggesting that

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<sup>5</sup> Wood, J 2010 *Thrumster Millburn: Written Scheme of Investigation*, Highland Archaeology Services, Cromarty (Report No. HAS100606)

<sup>6</sup> Op cit, note 5



it had been cleaned out. This observation is consistent with insertion of a later field drain prior to backfilling of the ditch.

The rumbling drain (Feature 7),(Fig. 3, 6, 8 - section EE) appears to have originated close to the mill dam (Fig. 2) and may have been constructed to deal with dam seepage. It ran parallel to the fence as far as the break in the fence line. At this point it appears to have turned northwards, possibly to feed back into the mill laid down stream of the dam.

Stripping of the hammer-head area revealed the continuation of the long rumbling drain and another field drain (Fig.3, 8 – section FF). There were no other features or finds of archaeological interest identified in this area.

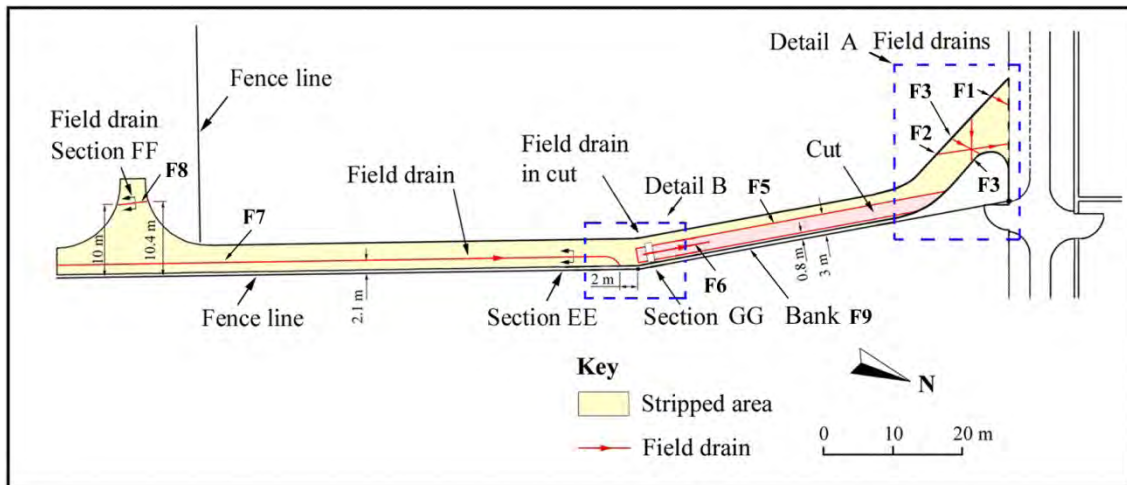


Figure 3 Site plan

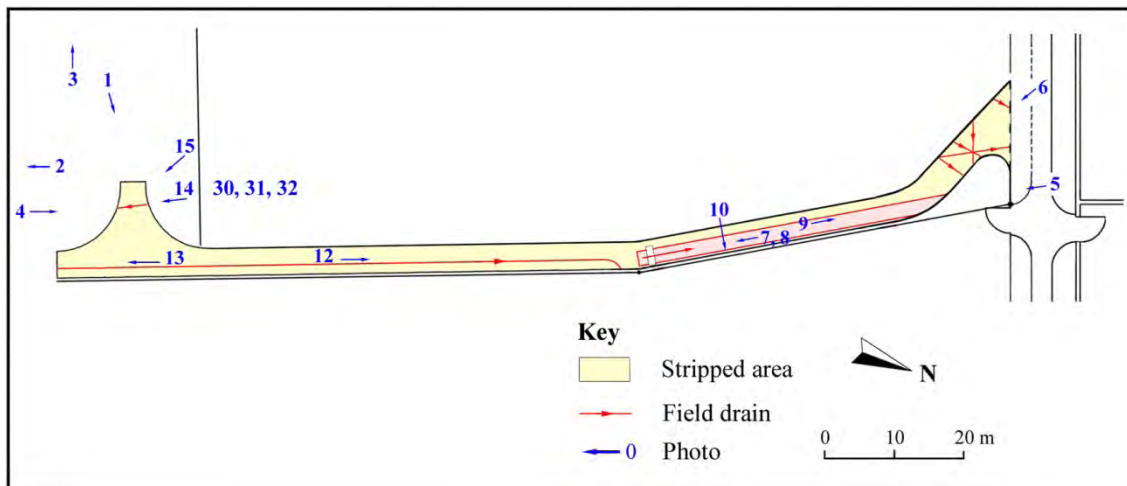


Figure 4 Site plan image loci



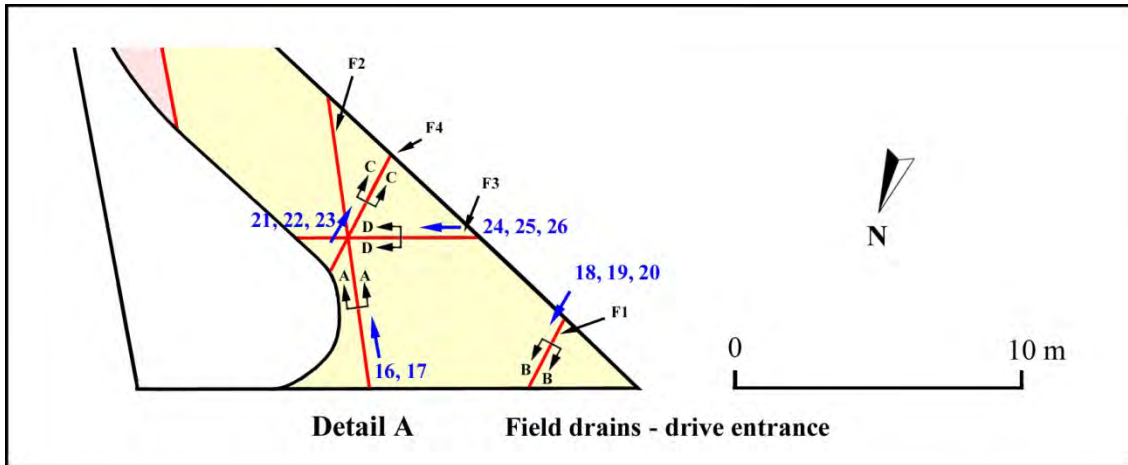


Figure 5 Detail A

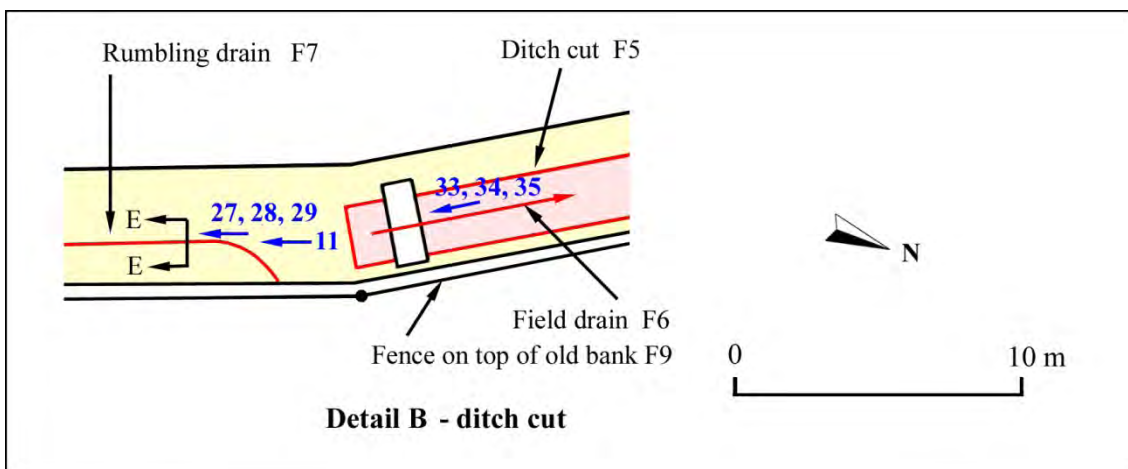


Figure 6 Detail B

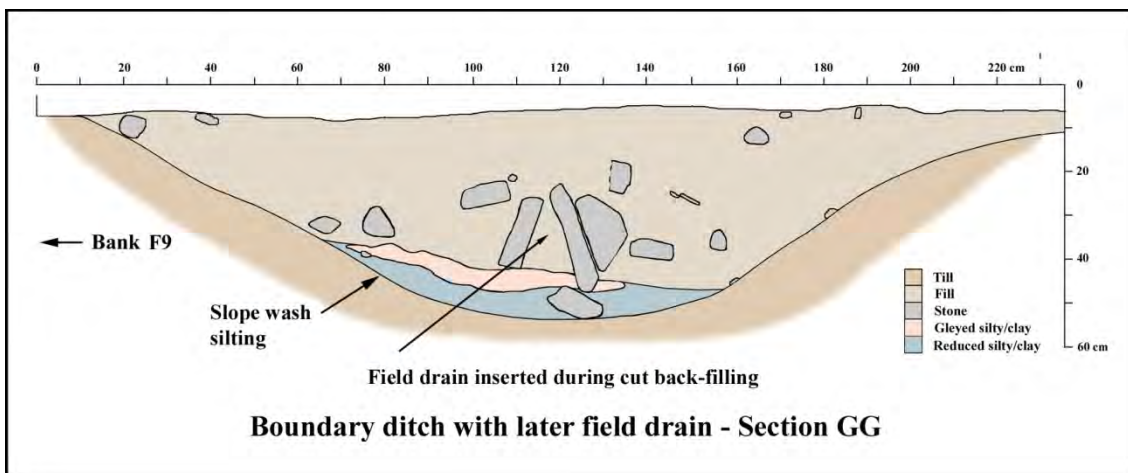


Figure 7 Boundary ditch section (F5)

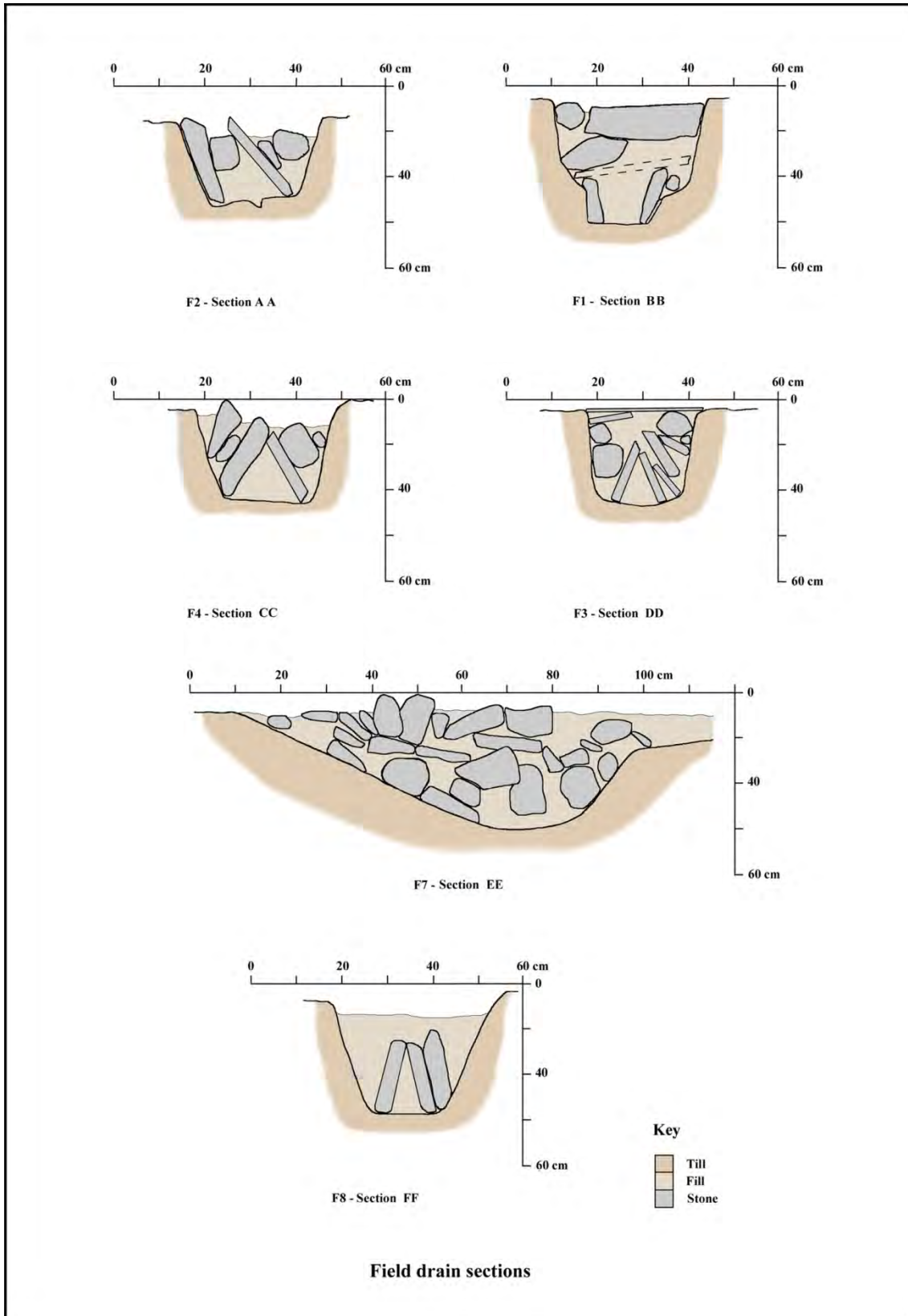


Figure 8 Field drain sections

## Conclusions and recommendations

There were no indications of prehistoric or medieval archaeology. The only features encountered during the stripping of the access drive related to the agricultural improvements of the later 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It is recommended that that no further archaeological intervention is required.

## Tables

**Table 1 Drawings**

Drawing	Title	Subject	Figure in text	Location (centre) (E,N)	Drawn by	Date
Drawing 1	Plan 1	Overall site plan	Fig 3	332508, 944800	PDH	09 07 2010
Drawing 2	Plan 2	Photo locations	Fig 4	332508, 944800	PDH	17 08 2010
Drawing 3	Section AA	Feature 2 (Field drain)	Fig 8	332417, 944844	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 4	Section BB	Feature 1 (Field drain)	Fig 8	332460, 944842	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 5	Section CC	Feature 4 (Field drain)	Fig 8	332469, 944840	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 6	Section DD	Feature 3 (Field drain)	Fig 8	332467, 944841	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 7	Section EE	Feature 7 (Field drain)	Fig 8	332509, 944797	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 8	Section FF	Feature 8 (Field drain)	Fig 8	332532, 944736	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 9	Section GG	Feature 5 (Boundary Ditch)	Fig 7	332504, 944806	PDH	12 07 2010
Drawing 10	Detail A	Features 1-4	Fig 5	332469, 944841	PDH	09 08 2010
Drawing 11	Detail B	Features 5,6,7	Fig 6	332470, 944840	PDH	18 08 2010

**Table 2 Photographs**

Photo No.	Notes	Taken by	Date
1	View from site looking east	PDH	30 06 2010
2	View from site looking south	PDH	30 06 2010
3	View from site looking south west	PDH	30 06 2010
4	View from site looking north west	PDH	30 06 2010
5	Access drive looking south east	PDH	30 06 2010
6	Stripped drive looking east	PDH	30 06 2010
7	Access drive route looking south east - ditch cut	PDH	30 06 2010
8	Ditch cut detail	PDH	30 06 2010
9	Cut alignment with distant ditch and bank boundary	PDH	30 06 2010
10	Buried soil under bank remnant	PDH	30 06 2010
11	Rumbling drain	PDH	30 06 2010

Photo No.	Notes	Taken by	Date
12	Stripped access drive showing rumbling drain	PDH	30 06 2010
13	Rumbling drain continuation at hammer-head	PDH	30 06 2010
14	Field drain at hammer-head	PDH	30 06 2010
15	Stripped hammer-head looking east	PDH	30 06 2010
16	Field drain section 'AA' (Figure 8)	PDH	30 06 2010
17	Field drain section 'AA' (Figure 8) re-instated	PDH	30 06 2010
18	Field drain section 'BB' (Figure 8) stage 1	PDH	30 06 2010
19	Field drain section 'BB' (Figure 8) stage 2	PDH	30 06 2010
20	Field drain section 'BB' (Figure 8) stage 3	PDH	30 06 2010
21	Field drain section 'CC' (Figure 8) stage 1	PDH	01 07 2010
22	Field drain section 'CC' (Figure 8) Stage 2	PDH	01 07 2010
23	Field drain section 'CC' (Figure 8) re-instated	PDH	01 07 2010
24	Field drain section 'DD' (Figure 8) stage 1	PDH	01 07 2010
25	Field drain section 'DD' (Figure 8) stage 2	PDH	01 07 2010
26	Field drain section 'DD' (Figure 8) re-instated	PDH	01 07 2010
27	Rumbling drain section 'EE' (Figure 8)	PDH	01 07 2010
28	Rumbling drain section 'EE' (Figure 8) close-up	PDH	01 07 2010
29	Rumbling drain section 'EE' (Figure 8) re-instated	PDH	01 07 2010
30	Field drain section 'FF' (Figure 8)	PDH	01 07 2010
31	Field drain section 'FF' (Figure 8) close-up	PDH	01 07 2010
32	Field drain section 'FF' (Figure 8) re-instated	PDH	01 07 2010
33	Ditch section 'GG' (Figure 7) stage 1	PDH	01 07 2010
34	Ditch section 'GG' (Figure 7) stage 1 close-up	PDH	01 07 2010
35	Ditch section 'GG' (Figure 7) stage 2	PDH	01 07 2010

Table 3 Features

Feature No	Drawing	Contexts	Interpretation	Location 1 (E, N)	Location 2 (E, N)
F1	1,2,4,10	1, 2	Field drain	332460, 944844	332460, 944841
F2	1,2,3,10	3, 4	Field drain	332465, 944846	332471, 944837
F3	1,2,6,10	5, 6	Field drain	332464, 944840	332470, 944843
F4	1,2,5,10	7, 8	Field drain	332471, 944837	332466, 944846
F5	1,2,9,11	9, 10, 12, 13	Boundary Ditch	332476, 944841	332505, 944805
F6	1,2,9,11	11	Field drain	332504, 944805	332498, 944813
F7	1,2,7,11	14, 15	Field drain (Rumbling drain)	332507, 944803	332545, 944730
F8	1,2,8	16, 17	Field drain	332531, 944738	332533, 944734
F9	1,2	18,19	Boundary bank - upcast from F5	332547, 944731	332473, 944850



**Table 4 Contexts**

Context No	Type	Photo	Drawing No	Stratigraphy			Feature No	Interpretation
				above	below	equal		
0	topsoil			1- 17				Ploughsoil
1	cut	18, 19	1,2,4,10	20	2		1	Field drain cut
2	deposit / structure	18, 19	1,2,4,10	1	0		1	Field drain fill
3	cut	16, 17	1,2,3,10	20	4		2	Field drain cut
4	deposit / structure	16, 17	1,2,3,10	3	0		2	Field drain fill
5	cut	24-26	1,2,6,10	20	6		3	Field drain cut
6	deposit / structure	24-26	1,2,6,10	5	0		3	Field drain fill
7	cut	21-23	1,2,5,10	20	8		4	Field drain cut
8	deposit / structure	21-23	1,2,5,10	7	0		4	Field drain fill
9	cut	8, 9	1,2,9,11	20	10, 13		5	Cut for boundary ditch
10	fill	8, 9	1,2,9,11	9, 12, 13	0	11	5	Fill of boundary ditch containing 11
11	structure	33, 34, 35	1,2,9,11	12		10	6	Field drain constructed within fill of boundary ditch (10)
12	deposit	35	9	9, 13	10, 11		5	Silting of open ditch - slope-wash deposit
13	deposit	35	9	9	12, 10		5	Initial silting of open ditch
14	cut	27-29	1,2,7,11	20	15		7	Field drain cut
15	deposit / structure	27-29	1,2,7,11	14	0		7	Field drain fill
16	cut	30-32	1,2,8	20	17		8	Field drain cut
17	deposit / structure	30-32	1,2,8	16	0		8	Field drain fill
18	deposit	10	1,2	19				Boundary bank - upcast from F5
19	deposit	10	-		18			Buried soil level below 18
20	natural subsoil				1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 14, 16, 19			Natural subsoil

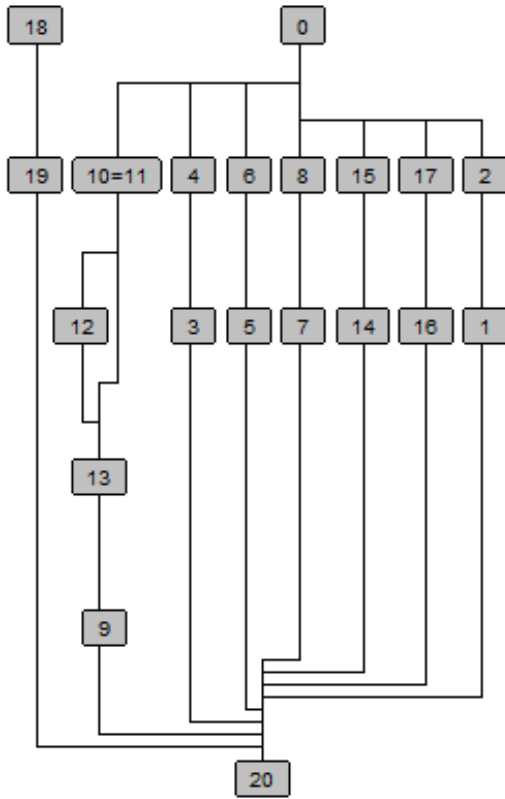


Figure 9 Stratigraphy (Harris Matrix)

## Plates



Plate 1 View of site looking north east (pre-start)



**Plate 2 View of site looking south (pre-start)**



**Plate 3 View looking south-west (pre-start)**





**Plate 4 View looking north-west (pre-start)**



**Plate 5 Access drive route entrance looking south east**





Plate 6 Stripped drive entrance looking east



Plate 7 Drive looking south east – ditch cut (2m scale)





**Plate 8 Ditch cut detail (1m scale)**



**Plate 9 Cut alignment with distant ditch and bank land boundary (2m scale)**





**Plate 10 Buried soil under bank remnant (Feature 9) (30cm scale)**



**Plate 11 Rumbling drain (2m scale)**





**Plate 12 Stripped access drive showing rumbling drain cut**



**Plate 13 Rumbling drain continuation at hammer-head**





Plate 14 Field drain at hammer-head



Plate 15 Stripped hammer-head looking east





**Plate 16** Field drain section 'AA' (Figure 8) (30cm scale)



**Plate 17** Field drain section 'AA' (Figure 8) re-instated





Plate 18 Field drain section 'BB' (figure 8) stage 1 (30cm scale)



Plate 19 Field drain section 'BB' (figure 8) stage 2 (30cm scale)





Plate 20 Field drain section 'BB' (figure 8) stage 3 (30cm scale)



Plate 21 Field drain section 'CC' (figure 8) stage 1





Plate 22 Field drain section 'CC' (figure 8) stage 2 (30cm scale)



Plate 23 Field drain section 'CC' (figure 8) re-instated





**Plate 24** Field drain section 'DD' (figure 8) stage 1 (30cm scale)



**Plate 25** Field drain section 'DD' (figure 8) stage 2 (30cm scale)





**Plate 26** Field drain section 'DD' (figure 8) re-instated



**Plate 27** Rumbling drain section 'EE' (figure 7) (2m scale)





**Plate 28** Rumbling drain section 'EE' (figure 7) close-up (scale in 0.5m divisions)



**Plate 29** Rumbling drain section 'EE' (figure 7) re-instated (scale in 0.5m divisions)





**Plate 30** Field drain section 'FF' (figure 8) (scale in 0.5m divisions)



**Plate 31** Field drain section 'FF' (figure 8) close-up





Plate 32 Field drain section 'FF' (figure 8) re-instated



Plate 33 Ditch cut section 'GG' (figure 8) stage 1 (30cm scale)





Plate 34 Ditch cut section 'GG' (figure 8) stage 1 close-up (30cm scale)



Plate 35 Ditch cut section 'GG' (figure 8) stage 2