



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd
Bringing the Past and Future Together

Preston's Croft

Roster, Caithness



Watching Brief Report

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Watching Brief Report

Report No.	HAS101005
Site Code	HAS- OPC10
Grid Ref	ND 2667 3966
Client	Gmack Construction
Planning Ref	08/00187/REMCA
OASIS	highland4-85135
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Author	Paul Humphreys

Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment and watching brief was undertaken in response to a planning condition during excavations for a new dwelling at Preston's Croft, Roster; nothing of archaeological significance was encountered.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The construction a new private house at Preston’s Croft, Roster, required as a condition of planning consent that an archaeological watching brief be conducted during site stripping.



Figure 1 Site location

Location and setting

The site lies at Roster, centred approximately at OS grid reference ND 2667 3966 at about 125m above sea level (Figure 1). The site itself is depicted in Figures 2 and 3 below. It is located in improved farm land on rising ground on the west facing flank of Pigeon Hill. The south-western aspect overlooks a broad ice-sculpted valley with the hills that mark the mark the southern boundary of the county in the far distance. Green Hill broch lies 150 m to the north, this being the only known archaeology close to the site (Photo 1).



Figure 2 Site extent

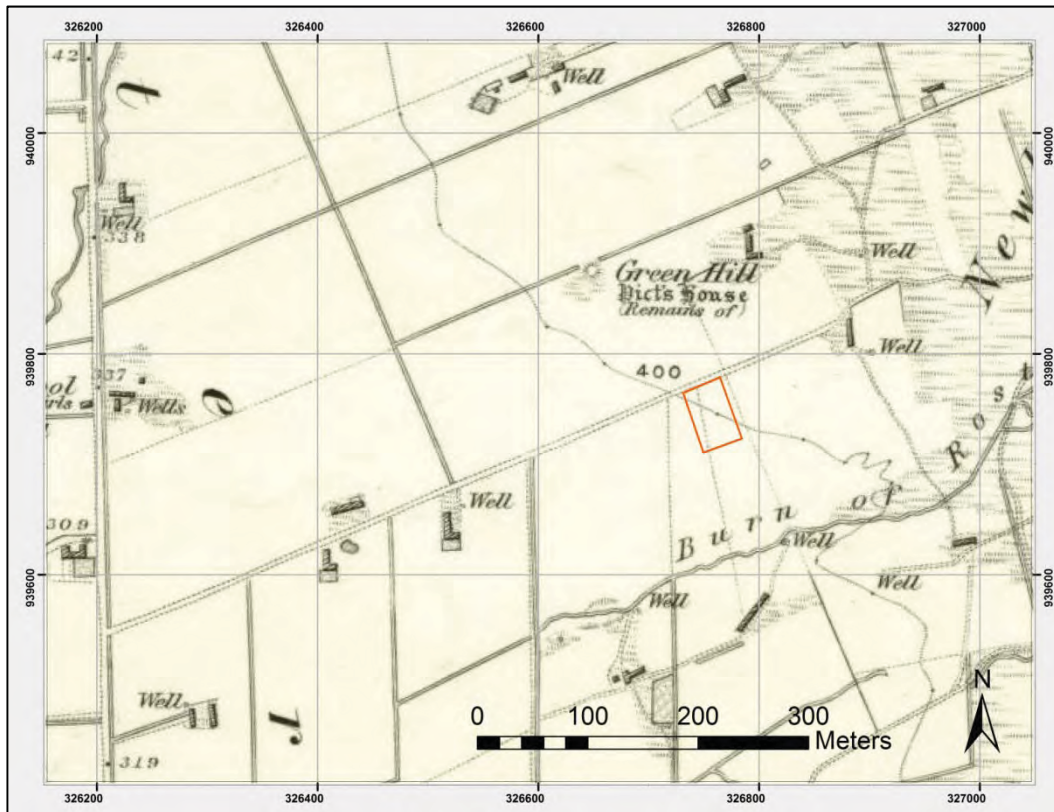


Figure 3 Extract from Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map, surveyed 1875.
Inverness Mainland Sheet XII.13 (Combined). Modern OS National Grid and site extent superimposed.

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.

Background

Archaeology

Although no archaeological sites have been recorded within the development site itself, this part of Caithness is particularly rich in archaeology. 160m NNW of the site is the mound covering the remains of Green Hill broch, which is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as of national importance. The wider landscape includes a large number of important prehistoric sites including the Mid Clyth Stone Rows (3km from the present site), the Camster cairns (4.4km) and the sites along the Yarrows Archaeology Trail (4.5km). Excavations on the Thrumster

Estate have reveal indications of buried Mesolithic /Neolithic archaeology. There is therefore potential for archaeological features or artefacts to be discovered here. The medieval landscape is more difficult to recover. Settlement and agricultural arrangements were swept away by Agricultural Improvement in the late 18th and early 19th c. which set out the straight roads and field boundaries visible today, as well as draining and enclosing former areas of moss and moor (See Fig 2 and 3 below). However among the new farmsteads shown on the first edition OS 6 inch map there seem to be some possible longhouses clustered around the Burn of Roster that could indicate the location of a former fermtoun. The place-name Roster is typical of many in Caithness in including the Norse *-ster* suffix indicating a farm or small estate. This suggests that the broch may have formed the focus of continuing settlement in the Norse and later periods. The burn takes its name from the place rather than the other way round. (The first element might represent a Norse personal name or could be the Gaelic *ros* meaning a prominent hill or similar feature.)

Policy

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 current planning and policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*¹, and the Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy* (SPP), issued in February 2010, which consolidates and supersedes the previous SPP and NPPG series². The fundamental principles underpinning UK and Scottish policies are set out in the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).³

Programme

A desk-based assessment was followed by the watching brief which was carried out in October 2010 in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Highland Council.⁴

Results

Stripping the house base area indicated an undifferentiated plough-soil ranging in depth from 38 cm to 60 cm. This unusually deep top-soil lay directly over a reddish brown gravelly till (photo 7) that sloped slightly towards the southwest. The till, which contained occasional large stones, became less gritty, with a higher percentage of clay minerals in the southwest corner of the stripped area. An apparent 'arrangement' of stones, one set on edge, was also noted in the south west corner (Drawings 1 and 2; Photos 8, 9, 10). Two distinct deposits, one black the other light grey, also appeared, at first sight, to be associated with the stones (Drawing 2; Photos 8, 9, 10, 11).

The stones and deposits together were designated Feature 1. At first sight this appeared to be a hearth-like structure, although there was no evidence of heating. The black and grey deposits were sampled to aid interpretation. The pale grey deposit proved to be clay; no large fragments of charcoal

¹ <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/8>

³ Australia ICOMOS 1999, *The Burra Charter* <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

⁴ Wood J 2010 *Prestons Croft, Roster Caithness: Proposed Watching Brief: Written Scheme of Investigation*, Highland Archaeology Services, Cromarty

were found in the dry sample of the black deposit, however the addition of water floated-off small fragments of charcoal although the majority of the black material proved to be mineral, most probably a soft pan of manganese common in Caithness soils.

The largest of the stones within Feature 1 exhibited frequent striations (photos 10 and 12). These were interpreted as ploughshare marks. The marks were predominantly on the down-slope side of the stone consistent with ploughing up-slope. This was the preferred direction of ploughing before the introduction of the Ferguson hydraulic hitch, as it helped prevent the ploughs tendency to ride-up out of the soil.

On balance Feature 1 is best interpreted as a natural feature with the pattern of deposits arising from localised soil chemistry. The edge-set stone is interpreted as ploughing disturbance. The small quantities of charcoal could have arisen from land clearance during the time of the agricultural improvements or possibly from later stubble burning.

The 3 m square stripped area for the septic tank yielded nothing of archaeological significance (Photo 13).

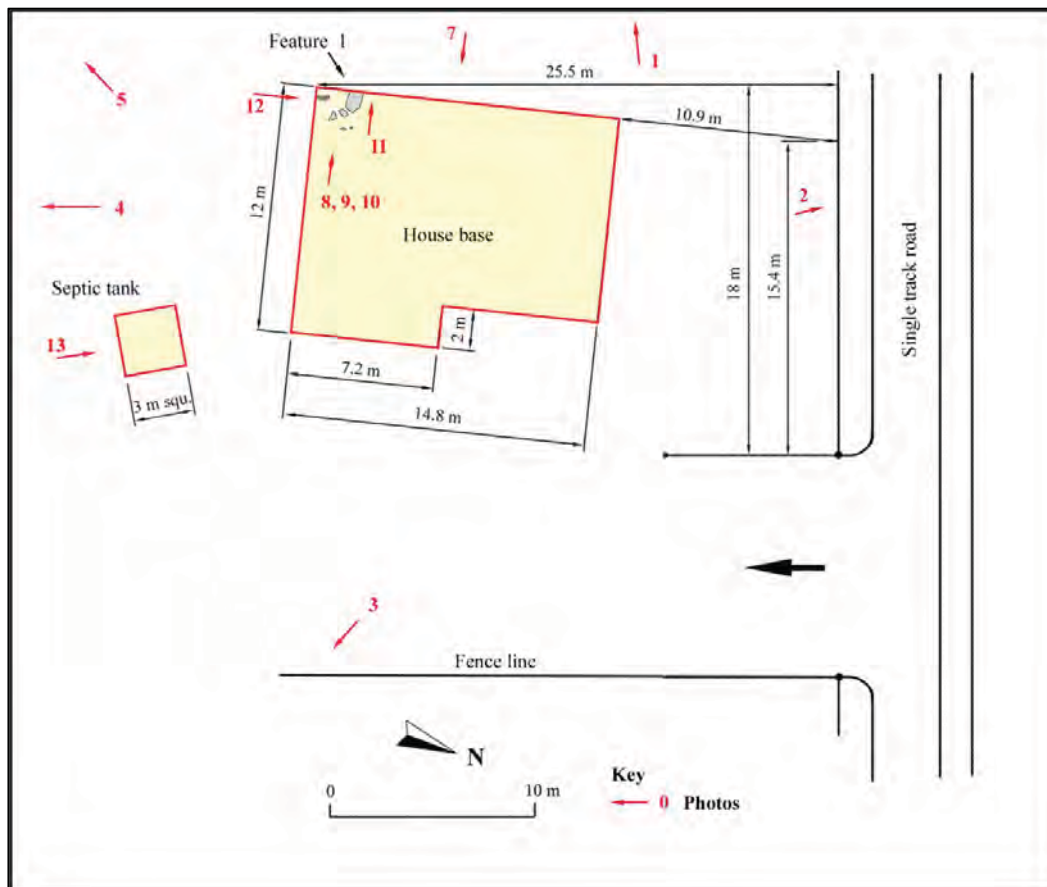


Figure 4 (Drawing 1) Site plan (schematic)

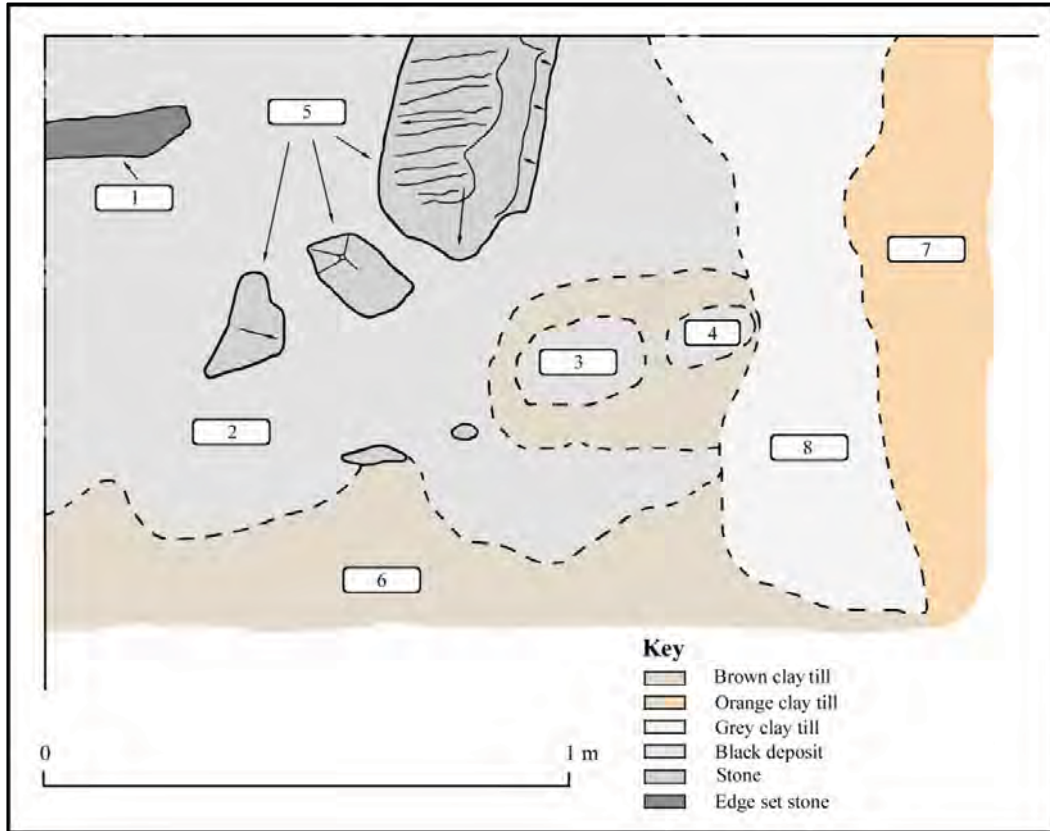


Figure 5 (Drawing 2) Feature 1 plan

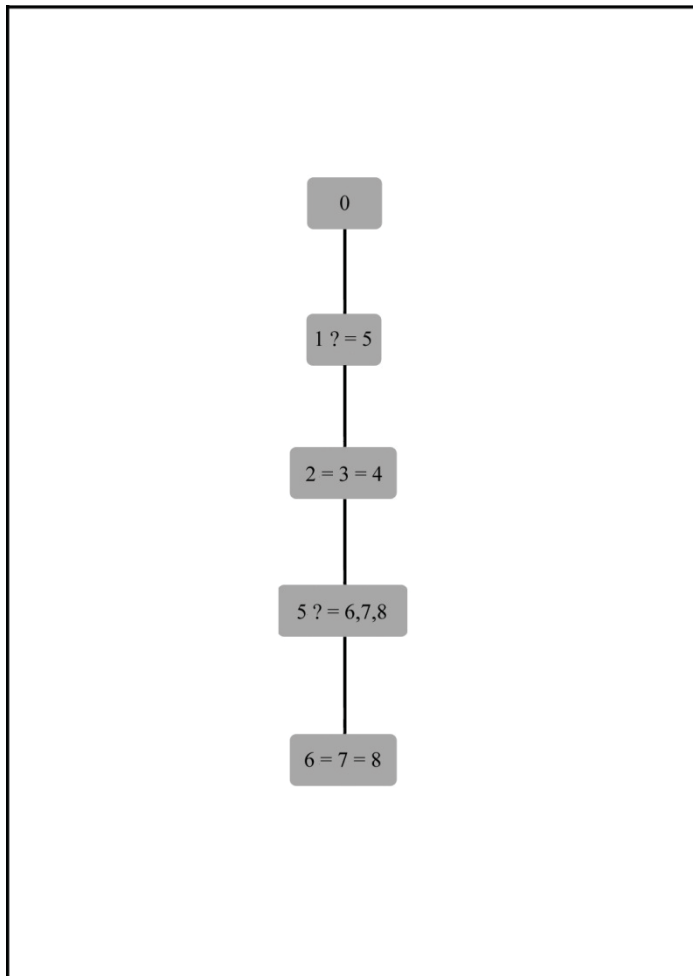


Figure 6 Stratigraphy: Feature 1 - Harris matrix

Conclusions and recommendations

There were no features or finds of archaeological interest identified in the stripped areas. No further archaeological work is proposed.

Tables

Table 1 Drawings

Drawing No.	Title	Subject	Location (Centre E,N)	Drawn by	Date
1	Site plan	Overall site plan	326677 939661	PDH	25 09 2010
2	Feature 1 - plan	Feature 1	326673 939665	PDH	25 09 2010

Table 2 Photographs

	Notes	Taken by	Date
1	View from site looking southwest (pre-start)	PDH	13 07 2010
2	View of broch from site looking northwest (pre-start)	PDH	13 07 2010
3	View from site looking east (pre-start)	PDH	13 07 2010
4	View from site looking southeast (pre-start)	PDH	13 07 2010
5	View from site looking south (pre-start)	PDH	13 07 2010
6	Typical gritty clay till	PDH	13 07 2010
7	Stripped house-base looking east - looking east	PDH	13 07 2010
8	Feature 1 - looking west	PDH	14 07 2010
9	Feature 1 - close-up looking west	PDH	14 07 2010
10	Feature 1 - plan view	PDH	14 07 2010
11	Feature 1 - dark deposit profile looking west	PDH	14 07 2010
12	Feature 1 - detail showing ploughshare marks looking north	PDH	14 07 2010
13	Stripped septic tank location looking northwest	PDH	08 09 2010

Table 3 Features

Feature No.	Drawing Nos.	Contexts	Interpretation	Location 1 (E,N)	Location 2 (E,N)
1	1,2	0 to 8	Natural feature	326673 939665	N/A

Table 4 Archaeological Contexts and Stratigraphy

Context No.	Type	Photo	Drawing No.	Stratigraphy			Feature No.	Interpretation
				above	below	equal		
0	Deposit	11		1 to 8			1	Ploughsoil
1	Stone	2,3,4	2	15	0	5	1	Natural but disturbed
2	Deposit	8,9,10, 11	2	5,6,7,8	3	3,4	1	Manganese pan
3	Deposit	8,9,10, 11	2	5,6,7,8	3	2,4	1	Manganese pan
4	Deposit	8,9,10, 11	2	5,6,7,8	3	2,3	1	Manganese pan
5	Stone	8,9,10	2		0,1,2,3,4	6,7,8	1	Natural stone
6	Deposit	8	2		1,2,3,4	5,7,8	1	Brown clay till
7	Deposit	8,11	2		1,2,3,4	5,6,7	1	Grey clay till
8	Deposit	8	2		1,2,3,4	5,6,8	1	Orange clay till

Photographs



Photo 1 Site looking southwest (pre-start)



Photo 2 View looking northwest (pre-start)



Photo 3 View looking east (pre-start)



Photo 4 View from site looking southeast (pre-start)



Photo 5 Phase 1 stripped area looking south (pre-start)



Photo 6 Typical gritty clay till



Photo 7 Stripped house-base looking east



Photo 8 Feature 1 - looking west



Photo 9 Feature 1 - close-up looking west (30 cm scale)



Photo 10 Feature 1 – plan view (30 cm scale)



Photo 11 Feature 1 - dark deposit profile looking west (30 cm scale)



Photo 12 Feature 1 - detail showing ploughshare marks looking north



Photo 13 Stripped septic tank location looking northwest