

# REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT SITE 'H3', CLAYMORE DRIVE, ABERDEEN SCIENCE AND ENERGY PARK, ABERDEEN

NGR NJ 9537 1104



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## SUMMARY

In January and February of 2009, a representative of Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit undertook a programme of archaeological monitoring on groundworks relating to a development at Site 'H3', Claymore Drive, Aberdeen Science and Energy Park, Aberdeen (NGR NJ 9537 1104). The site is located within an area of known archaeological potential, particularly in terms of agricultural land use. In addition, recent fieldwalking and evaluation work to the north of the site has provided hundreds of flint finds, indicating early Bronze Age activity in the vicinity, with the further potential for a settlement of the period nearby. As a result, the Keeper of Archaeology at Aberdeen City Council outlined a programme of archaeological mitigation work to be undertaken in accordance with a planning condition attached to the development consent (Appendix 1).

The watching brief monitored the preparatory stages of redevelopment, including a soil scrape of the site, the excavation of 36 pits for foundation pads, and adjoining foundation strips, the excavation of a square pit for a lift shaft, and the excavation of service trenching across the southern, western and northern parts of the site.

Despite the high archaeological potential of the area, the watching brief did not encounter any archaeological features. The site showed a high level of recent disturbance and made-up ground deposits were encountered.

In view of the lack of archaeological features discovered at this site, and the degree of recent disturbance of the ground, this report recommends that no further archaeological work is required at this site, in relation to the present development. However it should be noted that the final decisions on such matters rest with the Keeper of Archaeology, Aberdeen City Council.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit would like to thank the client for commissioning the project. In addition, further thanks are extended to the Keeper of Archaeology at Aberdeen City Council for all advice relating to the project, and to all construction workers on-site for all their help and information, particularly Stuart Barrie and colleagues at MTM Construction Limited.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Cat Peters. The project was managed by Alison Cameron, Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Aberdeen City Council has approved an application for the redevelopment of agricultural land known as Site 'H3' on Claymore Drive at Aberdeen Science and Energy Park. The development site, centred on NGR NJ 9537 1104, is within an area of archaeological potential and it was thought that deposits of archaeological significance might exist in the area of the associated groundworks. As a result, a condition of the planning permission was that all excavation works undertaken during the redevelopment schedule should be monitored by an archaeologist, adhering to a specification provided by the Keeper of Archaeology at Aberdeen City Council (Stones 2008; Appendix 1). This scheme of works is in line with government advice as set out in the National Planning Policy Guideline No. 5, Archaeology and Planning. All stages of the archaeological work were undertaken following approved statutory guidelines (IFA 2002).
- 1.1.2 This report comprises the results of the archaeological monitoring of the relevant groundworks associated with the development, as outlined in the specification.
- 1.1.3 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design, and with current UKIC (1990). The archive will be deposited at Aberdeen City Council in the first instance, and a copy of the report given to Aberdeen City Council Sites and Monuments Record, where viewing will be available on request.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY**

- 2.1.1 The site is centred upon National Grid Reference NJ 9537 1104 on the eastern side of Claymore Drive, Aberdeen Science and Energy Park, Aberdeen. The site was, until recently, open farmland, and at the time of the investigation, was rough ground.
- 2.1.2 The site was bounded on all sides by field boundaries, and to the east lay a Golf Course, and to the west, Claymore Drive. Aberdeen Science and Energy Park extends to the south and north of the development site (Figure 1).

### **2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.2.1 The site has been used for agricultural purposes throughout the modern period, and stretching back in the medieval period (see Appendix 2). Medieval farmsteads are known to the south and west of the development site, and boundary stones are known from the area. Closer to the coast, to the east, Second World War defensive features are situated. Historical Ordnance Survey mapping reveals little more than the field boundaries which still survive in the vicinity of the site, and the farm buildings themselves.
- 2.2.2 A nearby programme of fieldwalking and evaluative work (Buchanan et al 2008) just to the north of the site, has located a large number of worked flint finds. Approximately 700 in total were recovered, as well as some archaeological features that may indicate early Bronze Age activity. Further work is anticipated. It is likely that the area was also utilised during the medieval period. This indicates a high potential for archaeological features to survive in this part of Aberdeen.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

- 3.1.1 The watching brief was carried out between Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> January and Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009. It monitored an initial soil scrape, the creation of foundation pads and the excavation of foundation strips between them, the excavation of a lift shaft pit and excavation for services and car parking areas, in accordance with the specification (Stones 2008; Appendix 1).
- 3.1.2 The soil scrape occurred across the whole area of the site, whilst excavations for the foundation pads and strips were limited to the southern half. The service trenches and car parking excavations were concentrated across the southern, western and northern extremes of the site (Figure 2).

### 3.2 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

- 3.2.1 **Initial Soil Scrape:** the initial soil scrape was undertaken by an excavator and bulldozer where up to 0.3m of material was removed from the site, mainly weeds, revealing a made-up ground consisting of a mix of sand and gravel of mid orange-brown colour and loose consistency. This was consistent with information that the site had been prepared for redevelopment between 15-19 years ago, when this deposit had been brought in to level the ground. No archaeological features or finds were encountered.



Plate 1: Initial Soil Scrape, facing east

- 3.2.2 **Excavation of Foundation Pad Pits and Strips adjoining them:** a total of 36 square pits were excavated for foundation pads, all of them measuring between 2.4m and 2.5m square, except Pits 33, 34 and 35 which measured



1.5m square, Pits 18 and 19 which were 1.2m square, and Pits 8 and 9 which were 1.5m in width and 4.3m in length. Strips between all of them, except Pits 16, 17 and 19, where no adjoining foundations strips were necessary, were excavated to a maximum width of 1m. All of the pits were excavated to a depth of between 0.8m and 1.2m, the majority being shallower, with the strips reaching a maximum depth of 0.7m (Plates 2 and 3). The location of these pits and strips is shown in Figure 2.

- 3.2.3 Each pad and strip revealed a depth of between 0.3m and 0.6m of mid orange-brown mixed deposit consisting of sand and gravel which overlay an orange firm clay deposit, in areas stonier, and in areas sandier, with occasional grey clay and large (up to 1m diameter) boulder inclusions. This is consistent with a deposit of make-up material directly overlying the natural, indicating previous modern disturbance in this area of the site.



Plate 2: Foundation Pad Pit 4,  
facing south



Plate 3: Pits 22, 21 and 20  
with adjoining strips, facing west

- 3.2.4 **Excavation of Lift Shaft Pit:** the lift shaft pit was excavated directly to the north of Foundation Pit 16 (Figure 2) and was 3m wide by 3m long to a depth of 1.2m. This revealed an orange-brown mixed deposit of gravel and sand 0.3m in depth, overlying an orange clay (Plate 4). This is consistent with the deposit of make-up material directly overlying the natural, observed during the excavation of the foundation pad pits and strips.



Plate 4: Lift Shaft Pit, facing east

3.2.5 **Excavation for Services:** the foul drains were the first to be excavated, linking the sites provisions in with the existing drains on Claymore Drive. This required the excavation of a 2m by 2m squared area for a new manhole in the north-western corner of the development site, followed by the excavation of a linear trench, 2m wide and 73m long on a roughly west-east alignment across the northern edge of the development site (Plate 5). The maximum depth reached for the foul drainage excavations was 1m, revealing up to 0.3m of mid orange-brown mixed deposit consistent with the made-up ground found in the southern part of the site, directly overlying a sandy orange natural with clay inclusions. A further foul drain channel was excavated running southwards from the new manhole, 0.7m in width for a total of 42m, with a 15m south-easterly branch to meet the foundation pad pits in order to link in with the workshop building due to be constructed to the east of the office.



Plate 5: Foul Drain Channel, facing east



3.2.6 Further service channels were excavated at the far western part of the site, this time for filter drains which required a trench of 1.7m width and 40m length on a roughly north-east to south-west alignment against the western boundary of the site (Plate 6). Roughly half-way along this, a further service channel was excavated, heading east for a distance of 34m, this time 1.2m in width. The maximum depth reached for the filter drains was 1.1m. The excavations revealed 0.3m depth of mid orange-brown mixed deposit overlying an orange sand, with occasional large boulder inclusions (up to 0.9m in diameter). At the far western edge, some undergrowth and topsoil survived to a depth of 0.05m, and at the far eastern part of the additional service channel, 0.1m of mid grey gravel deposit overlay the mid orange-brown mixed deposit. This had been deposited under archaeological supervision, for a temporary access surface.



Plate 6: Filter Drain Channel, facing south

3.2.7 **Excavation for Car Parking Areas:** an area adjacent to the east-west aligned linear foul drain trench at the north of the site was excavated to provide material and drainage for a car parking area. This was 5m in width, running adjacent to the foul drain trench, and excavated on a gentle slope, to a depth of 0.7m at its northern edge, and 0.3m at its southern (Plate 7). This revealed a mid orange-brown make-up deposit of 0.1m thickness overlying a loose orange sandy natural.



Plate 7: Car Parking Area under excavation, facing east

## **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1.1 Despite the high archaeological potential of the area, the watching brief did not encounter any archaeological features. The site showed a high level of recent disturbance and made-up ground deposits were encountered. The location of all groundworks monitored during the watching brief has been included within this report, and an archive has been kept for future reference.

### **4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.2.1 In view of the lack of archaeological features discovered at this site, and the degree of recent disturbance of the ground, this report recommends that no further archaeological work is required at this site, in relation to the present development. However it should be noted that the final decisions on such matters rest with the Keeper of Archaeology, Aberdeen City Council.

## 5. REFERENCES

- Buchanon, S., Cameron, A. and Peters, C. (2008) *Kingfisher Business Park, Murcar Aberdeen. Report on the archaeological evaluation, building recording and walkover survey*. Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit: Unpublished report.
- IFA (2002), *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*
- MCG (1992), *Standards in the museum care of archaeological collections*
- Peters, C. (2008) Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief at Site 'G', Claymore Avenue, Aberdeen Science and Energy Park, Aberdeen
- Stones, J. (2008) 'Development at Site H3 Claymore Drive, Aberdeen Science and Energy Park, Aberdeen, Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief' *unpublished project design by Aberdeen City Council (reproduced as Appendix 1)*
- UKIC (1990), *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage*

# APPENDIX 1: SPECIFICATION FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES CENTRAL AREA

### MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

#### Development at Site H3 Claymore Drive, Aberdeen Science and Energy Park, Aberdeen

##### Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief

##### Summary

This specification outlines the importance of this historic site and indicates the works which will be required to ensure that archaeological deposits are recorded and protected during development work.

#### 1.0 Site Location and Description

The area of the site (NGR NJ 9537 1104) is shown on the enclosed map extract. It is currently an open area which has been subject to some ground preparation to create plots within Aberdeen Science and Energy Park.

#### 2.0 Planning Background

The request for this watching brief is made in the context of National Planning Policy Guideline no 5, Archaeology and Planning, which states that archaeological remains should be regarded as part of the environment to be protected and managed. In paragraph 14, planning authorities are advised that they should ensure that archaeological factors are fully considered in both the development planning and development control processes. Paragraph 16 urges planning authorities to regard archaeological remains as a finite and often highly fragile resource vulnerable to needless or thoughtless damage or destruction. Paragraph 25 states that the implications of development proposals for ancient monuments and their settings should be considered at the outset of the development control process. It is appropriate for planning authorities to request, where appropriate, the prospective developer to arrange for archaeological fieldwork and ensure that relevant information on the cultural heritage is taken into account in any environmental assessment that may be necessary (paragraph 24).

#### 3.0 Historical and Archaeological Background

This site lies near the edge of the developed area on the northern fringe of Aberdeen, to east of Ellon Road. Until recently there had been very little archaeological work in the area, and few recorded historic sites, but an evaluation exercise some to the north at Murcar ('archaeological investigation' on attached map) revealed large numbers of flints, some of which were worked, as well as some features associated with fragments of pottery of prehistoric or early historic date. However, a watching brief within the Science and Energy Park at Site G in 2008 (see attached plan), revealed no surviving archaeological deposits. For further information please contact Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit – (01224) 523658; judiths@aberdeencity.gov.uk.

## **Requirement for Work – Watching Brief**

It is understood that no 'site scrape' will take place at this site and that ground disturbance will be confined to the following operations: creation of foundation pads, digging of foundation strips between those pads, tidying up levels within the yard area and excavation for services. Provision must be made by the developer for an archaeologist to watch all groundworks and to record any features or finds that are revealed. However, as soon as it is clear that no archaeological deposits will be disturbed by the development (owing to the presence of made ground or earlier disturbance) then the archaeological watching brief can be called off, after discussion with the Keeper of Archaeology.

### **5.0 Timetable**

A timetable must be agreed so that provision can be made for monitoring by the Keeper of Archaeology.

### **6.0 Staff Structure**

A list of key project staff with qualifications and experience will be submitted by the contractor. The use of unwaged staff will not normally be acceptable.

### **7.0 Health and Safety /PLI**

Such concerns and responsibilities are primarily a matter for the archaeological contractor who must submit evidence of conformity to the Health and Safety at Work Act and possession of public liability insurance to Aberdeen City Council.

### **8.0 Watching Brief**

- 8.1 An appropriate machine must be used to minimise damage to underlying archaeological deposits
- 8.2 All machine work must be carried out under the direct supervision of an archaeologist acceptable to the planning authority and the Keeper of Archaeology.
- 8.3 All excavation, both by machine and by hand, must be undertaken with a view to avoiding damage to any archaeological features or deposits which appear to be worthy of preservation *in situ*.
- 8.4 Any human remains which are encountered must initially be left *in situ*. Their removal will be a matter of discussion with the Keeper of Archaeology (who must be notified within 12 hours of their discovery) and will comply with the provisions of Scots Law.

### **9.0 Recording Systems**

These must be specified and should include the structure for site record.

### **10.0 Monitoring Arrangements**

It is necessary for the planning authority to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the watching brief in order to ensure the proper execution of the specification and therefore conformity to the brief. Stages at which monitoring is appropriate will be agreed between the archaeological contractor and the Keeper of Archaeology. The possibility of random inspections should not be excluded.



## 11.0 Reporting Requirements

Provision must be made for:

- 11.2 Specialist examination of animal and human bone and of any preserved or organic material.
- 11.3 Specialist conservation and examination of artefacts found during the watching brief.
- 11.4 Preparation of plans, sections and finds drawings to publication standards.
- 11.5 The sorting and analysis of records and the production of a written report on the work, published in a manner appropriate to its scale.
- 11.7 The preparation of a catalogued archive and its deposition in the City Council's Sites and Monuments record and the National Monuments Record of Scotland within six months of the end of the watching brief.
- 11.8 Copies of the archaeological report should be sent to the Keeper of Archaeology, the applicant and the planning authority. A brief survey of results should be submitted to *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, along with the appropriate fee. An OASIS report must also be provided.

## 12.0 Small finds

Finds of objects will be subject to the Scots Laws of Treasure Trove and Bona Vacantia and reported by the archaeological contractor to the Secretariat of the Treasure Trove Panel (Dr Alan Saville, National Museums of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JD) for disposal to an appropriate museum.

## 13.0 Timescale

The watching brief report must be produced within four weeks of the end of the field work.

## 14.0 Further Information

Additional information about the site, or this brief, can be obtained from the Keeper of Archaeology, Whitespace, 60 Frederick Street, Aberdeen, AB24 5HY Tel (01224) 523658.

## 15.0 Conclusion

The watching brief is to be carried out in compliance with this brief and in the context of NPPG 5. The selection of any contractor will be subject to approval of the Keeper of Archaeology. Work should be carried out in close liaison with the Keeper of Archaeology.

December 2008.

## APPENDIX 2: Historical Research

Outline history of Murcar.

As a settlement, Murcar has a long recorded history. It seems fair to say that Murcar was essentially a medieval fermtoun, the typical unit characteristic of medieval agricultural settlement in Scotland. When used in the following text the terms Murcar and fermtoun can be taken as interchangeable. Both terms denote a settlement of growing size (growing as one comes forward in the historical record) and characterised by several farms, and leased (or tacked) from a major landowner to a tenant, husbandman, who sub-leased (or tacked) to sub tenants.

As Murcar was located close to one medium sized town (the Cathedral town of Old Aberdeen, a Burgh of Barony after the late 15<sup>th</sup> century) and a large one (the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen) it is also fair to suppose that this proximity would have effected development here; that is to say that they would have had access to the large markets of the towns and their trades, and would not have needed their own tradesmen. This is reflected in the history of the settlement. Moreover the history of this fermtoun reflects the major pre and post reformation trends in land owning and management in Scottish history.

The name Murcar first appears in the historic record in 1136, when it was part of a series of lands granted by King David I to Nectan Bishop of Aberdeen.<sup>1</sup> Alexander has noted that the name Murcar often appears, in the historical variant of Murcroft or Muircroft. It would seem fair to say, based on these versions of the name, that there has been farming in this area since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, that farming in fact lent itself to the naming of this place. As these are English elements it may suggest that this name derives from around the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

However, Alexander goes on to indicate that early variants on the orthography of the name are: Murrod and Murcrod.<sup>3</sup> These render the origins of the name more obscure. No explanation for the meaning of these names has been forthcoming from any of the standard sources on the meaning of Scottish place names. It is tempting to suggest that these names are of much older antiquity than the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This places them in a potentially Pictish context for their emergence. Given the recent archaeological finds in the area showing possible pre 12<sup>th</sup> century, or 'dark age' evidence for human activity in the area, it seems all the more tempting to argue that this has been a site occupied for in excess for 1000 years (at a conservative estimate and not taking into account the prehistoric evidence).

The place name first occurs in a charter recorded in the *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*. This records a charter granted by David I to Nectan, bishop of Aberdeen in 1136. The charter purportedly grants a series of lands to the bishopric. These included 'Sclaty, Goul, Murcroft, Kynmondy, Malmeulach...' as well as various churches and rights.<sup>4</sup> These rights were confirmed by a second charter, again recorded in the *Registrum* by Malcolm in 1155<sup>5</sup> and a bull by Pope Adrian IV in 1157.<sup>6</sup>

The problem with the charters mentioned immediately above by Scottish kings (but not the Papal bull) is that as Cosmo Innes, the editor of the published version of the *Registrum*, states none 'can be sustained as genuine'.<sup>7</sup> This is evident because the charters are later, possibly 15<sup>th</sup> century copies of originals, the methods of dating given on the charter and the concluding testing clauses in the charters do not in anyway make them 12<sup>th</sup> century. Given that these charters endowed the cathedral with great tracts of land and rights, the reason for creating these 'forgeries' seems obvious.

However, the Papal Bull of Adrian IV as Innes notes 'affords all the materials for testing its authenticity, and, submitted to the tests, stands undeniably authentic.'<sup>8</sup> The Bull grants, or rather seems to confirm

<sup>1</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.3

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, W., *Place Names of Aberdeenshire*, p.94.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, W., *Place Names of Aberdeenshire*, p.94.

<sup>4</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, pp 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, pp 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.xii.

<sup>8</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.xix.

grants of lands to the Bishopric including those listed above, including Murcar, but rendered here as Murrod.<sup>9</sup> In this sense then the later, possibly 15<sup>th</sup> century, forged documents may simply have been an attempt by a clerk then to render older documents in a style which was recognisable to him, rather than a criminal attempt to establish fraudulent credentials for landownership. His mistake was to be sloppy. What is also intriguing is that the later 'forged' documents (sometimes referred to as memoranda) use the version of the name Muircroft, whilst the oldest authentic one uses the more obscure version of the name, Murrod. In itself this may go some way to bolstering the notion that Muircroft is a later version of the name and that Murrod is older and thus that the place name may date from Pictish times, at least.

The bishop of Aberdeen remained the feudal superior of the lands of Murcar until the time of the reformation. From a document dated 1256 and recorded in the *Registrum*, it seems the lands of Murcar, along with the chapel at Kirkton, were assigned to the revenues used by the Dean of the Cathedral chapter.<sup>10</sup> Although there is no particular evidence to support the notion that this was a settled farming based community at that time it seems a fair suggestion. The lands must have been feued out to farmers (possibly directly or more likely through a husbandman) as they were producing sufficient money for them to be assigned to the revenues of the Dean of the Cathedral Chapter.

In July 1408 Robert, Duke of Albany issued a charter to Patrick of Sanquhare confirming a charter and grant of lands of Muircroft granted to him by John of St Michael. The confirmation specifies: 'de tota terra sua de Murecrofte cum pertinenciis, jacente in baronia de Polgowny infra vicecomitatum de Abirdene.'<sup>11</sup> This suggests that St Machar's Cathedral was no longer superior of these lands. Thus it may well have been the case that the Cathedral had alienated (feued) these lands probably in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (at best all that can be said is at some point after 1256 and before 1408), in return, for a fixed annual rent (this differs from a tack or lease where the ultimate ownership of the lands remains with the leaser, but in a feu they are given to the feuee). At any rate the lands were now in private hands. By no means is it entirely unusual to find alienation of lands happening around this time, although it is more common to find it in the early to mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. By this time, we can also say that the lands were now part of the Barony of Polgownie, later Balgownie. Nevertheless the continued interest of the Cathedral in the lands can be demonstrated down to, and beyond, the Reformation. Later documents reveal the Barony of Balgownie to have included Balgownie itself, Westfield, Murcar, Kethocksmill (there seem to have been later mills, including a Waulk Mill), the patronage of the altar of St Dominic and rights of fishing in the Don and on the sea.

The first historical indication of the physical geography of the fermtoun occurs in a document of 1446. This narrates the boundaries between Murcroft and Scotstown. The document narrates the boundaries as follows: 'In [th]e first begynnand at [th]e doubfurde of luthland and syn strekand vp til a blindfurde beneth [th]e siluerfurde and syn south til a litil hill in [th]e markat gate And syn evyn furth til a rod behynd [th]e Camehill And sua furth to [th]e Caryn of Mar And syn down [th]e brow til a mykill pot lyke to be castyn with mennis handis And syn down til an o[th]er pot and to [th]e [th]ird pot down in [th]e den.'<sup>12</sup> The presence of a number of fords in the area points to a level of human traffic in the area, whilst the presence of the market gate (i.e. road to Aberdeen) is further evidence of trade in the area, probably at this point still largely agricultural, but probably also containing an element of fishing. The existence of this document suggests that there might have been some boundary dispute.

On 29 March 1509 Alexander Cabell the prebendary chaplain of Banchory Devenick founded an altar dedicated to Jesus Christ and Saint Dominic in St Machar's Cathedral. He endowed this altar in part with £10 from the annual rents of the lands of Murcar. This was done with the consent of Ade (Adam) Hepburn, the superior of the lands.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that the lands were producing in excess of £10 per

<sup>9</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume II, p.39.

<sup>11</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume I, p.385, no.907.

<sup>12</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.245.

<sup>13</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume I, p.353. Adam Hepburn, and his wife Elizabeth Ogstoun had taken possession of the Barony of Polgownie on 18 November 1503, by way of a charter issued by James IV, *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume II, p.585, n.2757. The charter granting the annual rent to the lands received royal consent from James IV on 20 February 1508 [7], p.683, n.3196.

annum and thus were fairly fertile. This was listed in 1519 as still providing £10 per annum for the altar of St Dominic.<sup>14</sup>

On 22 February 1527 a third part (terciam) of the lands of the barony of Polgownie were granted by Helen, relict of Adam Hepburn, to her heir Patrick Hepburn.<sup>15</sup> Whilst on 18 November of the following year Jonete Hepburn granted a third part of the Barony of Polgownie to John Hepburn. This included 'terciam partem de Murcur...'.<sup>16</sup> Thus it would seem that rights over the barony were being distributed amongst the Hepburn family. Mary, Queen of Scots, granted two parts of the lands of Polgownie to William Auchinlek and Elizabeth Cheyne, his wife, on 20 April 1550.<sup>17</sup> A later document in the same series specified that this included lands in Murcar.<sup>18</sup> On 2 August 1574 James VI granted the third part of the lands of Polgownie, including lands in Murcar and the advocation rights over the altar of St Dominic in St Machar's, to George Auchinlek (George's relationship to Patrick is not specified, but he may have been Patrick's son).<sup>19</sup> The Hepburn family continued its interest in the lands as well: on 22 March 1594 James VI granted Patrick Hepburn a third of the lands of Polgownie.<sup>20</sup> On 5 February 1603 Jeane Erskine, widow of George Auchinleck, renounced her claims of the third of the lands of Balgownie, including Murcar, to a nominee of Auchinleck for £1000.<sup>21</sup>

The attendant problems of running any estate occasionally brought the tenants and superiors of the lands of Murcar into court. Thus on 16 July Isobel Cheyn, described as the liferentrix, pursued a decree of removing against Robert Watsone. Robert appeared in court and consented to remove (whether he had failed to meet the conditions of his tack, or had overstayed the terms of his tack are not specified).<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless Robert Watson is the first named tenant of the lands of Murcar whose name has come down to us in the historic record. A few years later on 13 June 1604, a Thomas Watson in Murcar was tried for manslaughter of Alexander Henrie in Murcar in 1592 (some 12 years previously). The initial trial was delayed on account of a lack of jurors, but when convened Thomas was acquitted. The records report that 'Almost every one of the jurors were from the immediate neighbourhood'.<sup>23</sup> Thus they would probably have had some close knowledge of the alleged events, and certainly of the characters involved.

In the mid 1560s the Scottish government, under Mary Queen of Scots, ordered that all ecclesiastical revenues be surveyed. This was done in order to get a thorough understanding of them and then to split them into three parts: one part to go to the now redundant Catholic clergy; the second part to the new Protestant clergy and the final third to go to the crown. The *Books of Assumption of Thirds and Benefices* reveals that in 1560 the Deanery of Aberdeen was still receiving 30 merks annually from Murcar. This again points to this being a fertile and successful farming area: the 'Brigtoun' of Balgownie paid only 20 merks whilst a little further north Mundurno rendered only 10 merks.<sup>24</sup> Charters issued after this date continued to give the grant on condition that all tiends and ecclesiastical rights were met.

Something of an indication of the extent of the lands of Murcar can be found in a court case heard before Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court on 25 August 1620. In this case one sixth part of the lands and town of Murcar were described as 'extending to aucht oxingate...'.<sup>25</sup> An oxgang (here given in a variant as an oxgate) was the area which one ox could pull the plough over in any one year. To an extent this is notional and would vary from area to area and from ox to ox; but was generally reckoned to be in the region of 13 Scots acres (an acre Scots was reckoned to contain approximately 4 rigs). Thus if one sixth part of the lands was equal to 8 oxgang, then the sixth part would have been 104 acres (also known as a ploughgang, or ploughgate, which was the standard notation for the amount of land tillable in one year

<sup>14</sup> Innes, C., *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Volume II, p.109.

<sup>15</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume III, p.123, n.552.

<sup>16</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume III, p.155, n.709.

<sup>17</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume IV, pp 98-9, n.435.

<sup>18</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume IV, p.283, n.1268.

<sup>19</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume IV, p.611, n.2288.

<sup>20</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume VI, p.84, n.250.

<sup>21</sup> Littlejohn, D., *Records of Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court*, II, p.32.

<sup>22</sup> Littlejohn, D., *Records of Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court*, I, p.378.

<sup>23</sup> Littlejohn, D., *Records of Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court*, II, p.20.

<sup>24</sup> Kirk, J., *The Books of the Assumption of Thirds and Benefices*, Records of Social and Economic History, New Series 21, p.423.

<sup>25</sup> Littlejohn, D., *Records of Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court*, II, p.297.

by a team of 8 oxen). If this sixth part was an equal sixth part then the fermtoun of Murcar at that point comprised approximately 624 acres of land (i.e. 6x104). This would not be to suggest that all of this land was under the plough: rather this was a notional estimate of the entirety of the lands. Part of these lands would have been pasture lands for their animals and then the remaining tilled land would have been divided up into the intensively cultivated infield (defined by its head dyke) and the lesser cultivated outfield which might sometimes have been rotated with pasture land.

The court case of 25 August 1620 reveals more details of the conditions of tenancy on the lands of Murcar. The case involved a cautionary obligation on the part of Margaret Paul, relict of Robert Watson, that she would fulfil the conditions of his tenancy. These were specified as: 'To sufficientlie plenishe labour and occupie the said aqucht oxingait lands for winning of the cropt...and to pey the lyk mailles fermes dewties and dew seruice to the said Mr Thomas [Menzie, the superior of these parts of the lands at that time]...with the mylne seruice multurs knawschipand uthers usit and wont. And that the said Margaret sall pairt the outfield of the saids aucht oxingait lands with her neighbours presentlie be the adwyse of the said Mr Thomas...that scho sall leawe the haill houssis and biggings on her said occupatioune also sufficient and als guid estate as they ar presentlie.'<sup>26</sup>

On 8 June 1666 a charter was issued to Arthur Gordon of the lands and barony of Balgownie, which included the lands of Murcar.<sup>27</sup> Despite this the Lairdship seems to have remained in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in the hands of the Menzie family. The interest of the Gordon family may have been in a third, or other part of the lands. This branch of the Menzie family was related to the pre-eminent branch, the Lairds of Pitfodels. As with the Pitfodels branch of the Menzie family this branch were also steadfastly Catholic. Colonel Thomas Menzie was a Catholic who, according to Spalding had fled the country 'for reason of his religion before February, 1645.'<sup>28</sup> Five of Colonel Thomas's sons attended the Scots college at Douai; whilst John Row recorded the death of Alexander Menzie thus: 'The Laird of Balgownie, a papist surnamed Menzie, died hydroped at Abd., April 22, 1663, about aetatis 52.'<sup>29</sup>

By the time of the Poll Tax of 1696 the Barony of Balgownie was in the hands of Mr James Gray. It was in 1696 that the Barony of Balgownie came into the possession of the Gray family and remained with them into the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The 1696 Poll Tax provides the first glimpse of the social structure of the lands of Murcar. The Tax records reveal that there were a total of 47 tenants of Balgownie living in Murcar: being 22 men and 25 women. The majority of the men were farmers, as were some of the women. However, the majority of the women were described simply as spouses of mothers or daughters, but in most cases they would have worked in some seasonal capacity. In three cases people were given as having two occupations: both grassmen (those who actually tilled the soil) (including two grasswomen) as well as being weavers. It can also be said that of the baronies in the area, Balgownie gave the most in tax: some £720, whilst the Burgh of Barony of Old Aberdeen gave £650 and the Patton family of Grandholm gave £600. Of the Barony of Balgownie the lands of Murcar gave the most in tax, £17 3s 6d, of all the constituent parts of the Barony.<sup>31</sup>

The relative wealth and prosperity of the estate of Balgownie is also revealed in the 1667 Valuation Roll. The Parish of Old Machar paid £6858 1 2 as a total in that tax. Within this the Laird of Balgownie paid the most, £720, the next was the Town of Old Aberdeen, £700 whilst the next highest was £501.<sup>32</sup> This remained the case a few decades later in 1715 at the time of the cess tax levied by the Jacobites during the 1715 rebellion. Of all the valued rent in the parish of Old Machar in 1715 the Laird of Balgownie had the most, at £720, whilst the next highest was Grandholm estate with rent valued at £600.<sup>33</sup>

At some point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Barony of Balgownie may have been absorbed into the Estate of Seaton, which was owned successively the Forbes and then Hay families. Unfortunately there is no direct evidence concerning Murcar in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The suggestion that it may have ended up

<sup>26</sup> Littlejohn, D., *Records of Aberdeenshire Sheriff Court*, II, p.297.

<sup>27</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, Volume IX, p.459, n.917.

<sup>28</sup> Tayler, A & H., *The Valuation of the County of Aberdeen for the Year 1667*, p.339.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Tayler, A & H., *The Valuation of the County of Aberdeen for the Year 1667*, p.339.

<sup>30</sup> Tayler, A & H., *The Valuation of the County of Aberdeen for the Year 1667*, pp 240-1.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart, J., (ed.) *List of Pollable Persons within the Shire of Aberdeen, 1696, Volume II*, pp 553-4.

<sup>32</sup> Tayler, A & H., *The Valuation of the County of Aberdeen for the Year 1667*, p.34.

<sup>33</sup> Tayler, A. & H., *The Jacobite Cess Roll for the County of Aberdeen in 1715*, p.25.

becoming part of the lands of Seaton estate is based on the fact that the Seaton estate papers (held by the University of Aberdeen) contain papers dealing with farms which were previously part of the Barony of Balgownie. As the estate of Seaton emerged as the major landowner in the area in these centuries it seems logical that it would have purchased the Barony of Balgownie.

Irrespective of which estate actually held the lands of Murcar it was presumably during this period, specifically the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, that the farms in Murcar experienced the effects of the agricultural revolution. This would have involved formalising boundaries between fields, often by the erection of stone dykes. Fields were now more regularly shaped, as opposed to irregularly shaped and unbounded medieval fields. New patterns of crop rotation and new methods of fertilising would have been introduced at this time in an attempt to increase crop yield. The other part of this process was reclaiming marginal land. This may have happened at Murcar, but given the rental and taxation value of these lands in the later medieval and early modern periods there may not have been much scope for this type of progress here. Nevertheless the Seaton estate papers contain improving tacks from this period. For example a tack of a farm leased to John Fife on 19 September 1795 specified that previously uncultivated areas were to be cleared of stones, ploughed and divided into parks (i.e. farms) by stone dykes.<sup>34</sup>

The first Ordnance Survey map, of 1867, reveals a number of farms that were the descendants of the lands and farms of Murcar in the medieval period. These were Newton of Murcar, which survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was eventually demolished to make way for a road. Findlay Croft, which was gone by the time of the second Ordnance Survey map of 1901. Findlay Farm and Murcar: curiously by 1901 Murcar was renamed Findlay Farm, and the previous Findlay Farm seems to have been reduced to being an outbuilding for the new Findlay Farm. North and South Murcar: both of these survived until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they were demolished to make way for the ever-expanding residential development at the Bridge of Don. Finally Intown of Murcar: again this survived until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was demolished to make way for commercial development in the Bridge of Don area.

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<sup>34</sup> University of Aberdeen, Special Collections, Ms 2253/4/2.